

The Waters Assuaged

One of the Bible's most beloved verses is found in a book of judgement. It is Lamentations 3:22-23: “²² *Through* the LORD’s mercies we are not consumed, Because His compassions fail not. ²³ *They are* new every morning; Great *is* Your faithfulness. (Lamentations 3:22–23)

That God's mercies are new every morning is an image: it's the image of every cycle of 24 hours is as if God's kindness and mercy begins again, with a full 24 hours of unused mercy ahead of you. It's the idea of a day stretching the mercies of God, darkening with our sin, but then a dawn, and a new day of mercy.

Mercy means the chance to do something over, to have a fresh start, to begin again. Mercy means yesterday's sins do not have to poison today. Yesterday's evil are not today's concerns, when mercy washes away sin.

We all desire and hope for fresh starts, for the hope that what seems ruined and broken can be fixed. Warren Wiersbe said, “Genesis 8 can give you new hope and encouragement, because the major theme of the chapter is renewal and rest after tribulation. The chapter records the end of a storm and the beginning of new life and hope for God’s people and God’s creation. Just consider what God does in Genesis 8 and take courage!”

Genesis 8 is a chapter all about God showing mercy to a world that deserved none. After corrupting God's creation, the human race deserved destruction for rebelling in the Garden and increasing and deepening that rebellion. Some extra-biblical books suggest that humanity began distorting and corrupting animals too, so that all of creation was now taking on a distorted, deformed look. The Flood was a complete cleansing of the earth.

But after the devastation we read of in Genesis 7, Genesis 8 now recounts how the new start given to humanity unfolded, how this new world slowly emerged from the waters, how the new family of humanity emerged to begin again.

It's a story of receding waters, reconnoitring birds and returning worshippers.

I. Receding Waters

¹ Then God remembered Noah, and every living thing, and all the animals that *were* with him in the ark. And God made a wind to pass over the earth, and the waters subsided. ² The fountains of the deep and the windows of heaven were also stopped, and the rain from heaven was restrained. ³ And the waters receded continually from the earth. At the end of the hundred and fifty days the waters decreased. ⁴ Then the ark rested in the seventh month, the seventeenth day of the month, on the mountains of Ararat. ⁵ And the waters decreased continually until the tenth month. In the tenth *month*, on the first *day* of the month, the tops of the mountains were seen.

God remembered Noah and every living thing, and all the animals. This is a Hebrew way of saying, God took pity on them, God had mercy on them, God had thought and care for them. The rain went on for 40 days and 40 nights, but the waters kept rising for a total of 150 days. Now the flood is going to be slowly rolled back. Some parts are going to be more exposed.

The water coming from the ground is now stopped, and a wind begins to push the water back. The word for wind is the same word for spirit. Some see in this another allusion to creation, when the Spirit moved upon the face of the deep. God is recreating, in a sense. But it does seem like it was a physical wind. The winds could have been of tremendous force, with a whole globe of water, temperature differentials between the poles and the equator, with the earth's rotation. It appears the Lord stopped these massive waves and winds with all kinds of tectonic events: possible the collapse of subterranean caverns that had held all the water that burst out, becoming the bottoms of ocean basins. Deposited sediment formed new land structures, while volcanic activity had pushed up some land masses not previously there. It may be that Psalm 104 describes these very acts by God:

⁶ You covered it with the deep as *with* a garment; The waters stood above the mountains. ⁷ At Your rebuke they fled; At the voice of Your thunder they hastened away. ⁸ They went up over the mountains; They went down into the valleys, To the place which You founded for them. ⁹ You have set a boundary that they may not pass over, That they may not return to cover the earth. (Psalm 104:6–9)

The Ark stops floating and now comes to be grounded on one of the mountains of Ararat. If you add 150 days to Genesis 7:11 you get the date of 8:4 – the seventeenth day of the seventh month. The Ark is for practical intents and purposes, no longer a boat, but a very large building resting on the land, an indoor zoo of thousands of creatures.

But the mountains of Ararat in modern-day Turkey are very high, the highest peak in that mountain range is actually a dormant volcano, 5137 metres high. If the Ark was there or thereabouts, it may be one of the dry spots in the world, but it is by no means safe to open up the Ark yet.

So the Ark sits there, completely static, just waiting out the days. For another two-and-a-half months, the waters recede. We are now at day 224 of the Flood and mountain ranges could be seen, if you were an observer. Of course, there were no observers above the waters except the Lord Himself, so this a statement coming from the only one who could see.

Here is more evidence that this was a Global, not local Flood. Even the largest local floods will tend to drain or dissipate in a week or a few weeks at most. No local flood takes months to recede. But this was a worldwide deluge, and only now, the merciful hand of God is restraining the waters and causing them to recede.

With the Ark in place, Noah now moved to the next stage of entering this new world.

II. Reconnoitering Birds

⁶ So it came to pass, at the end of forty days, that Noah opened the window of the ark which he had made. ⁷ Then he sent out a raven, which kept going to and fro until the waters had dried up from the earth. ⁸ He also sent out from himself a dove, to see if the waters had receded from the face of the ground. ⁹ But the dove found no resting place for the sole of her foot, and she returned into the ark to him, for the waters *were* on the face of the whole earth. So he put out his hand and took her, and drew her into the ark to himself.

Reconnoitring means to inspect, observe, or survey (a region, etc.) in order to gain information. Noah and everyone aboard have just survived the most violent event in Earth's history, in fact, the most violent that will ever be. With such danger all about, it is to be expected that Noah adopts a cautious, careful approach. He needs the equivalent of animal reconnaissance, to see if this new world is still hostile, or if it has yet become hospitable to the survivors inside the Ark.

The Ark's inhabitants wait another forty days, bringing us to day 265 of the Flood. Noah opens the window, apparently the ventilation shaft mentioned in 6:16:¹⁶ You shall make a window for the ark, and you shall finish it to a cubit from above; and set the door of the ark in its side. (Genesis 6:16)

From this opening he sends out two creatures: a raven and a dove. This is a very purposeful decision by Noah. Ravens and doves do different things. Ravens scout for land, and feed on carcasses. Vikings used ravens to guide them, as they would watch the direction the ravens would fly. If they spotted land, they would fly in that direction and not return. Ravens are scavengers.

It seems the raven went to and fro, meaning it did not return. Ravens are scavengers and have no qualms about settling down on what is unclean. If the raven came back, the earth was far from dry. If it didn't, there were places to settle, which may or may not be suitable for humans and other animals. After all, ravens would have no problem landing on one of the many floating carcasses in the Flood.

Doves, on the other hand, are daintier birds, looking for places to nest. But because there was not yet enough foliage and dry spots to nest, the dove returned. The waters are receding more slowly than at first, because now many of the lakes and rivers are settling, and the earth is reliant on sunshine to dry it out. So Noah waits a week.

¹⁰ And he waited yet another seven days, and again he sent the dove out from the ark. ¹¹ Then the dove came to him in the evening, and behold, a freshly plucked olive leaf was in her mouth; and Noah knew that the waters had receded from the earth. ¹² So he waited yet another seven days and sent out the dove, which did not return again to him anymore.

He sends out a second dove, who returns with an olive leaf, meaning she found enough foliage to eat, but it was not yet dry enough to nest in, so she returned. Noah waits another week and sends out a third dove. This is now day 279 since the flood began.

But Noah does not simply disembark, because what may be good for birds may not be good for all the land animals.

III. Returning Worshipers

¹³ And it came to pass in the six hundred and first year, in the first *month*, the first *day* of the month, that the waters were dried up from the earth; and Noah removed the covering of the ark and looked, and indeed the surface of the ground was dry.

Noah waits another 35 days, and finally removes the covering, presumably a part of the roof, of the Ark. This seems to be the first visual confirmation Noah had that the surface of the ground was dry, and it appears to have been on Noah's 601st birthday.

But perhaps out of extra caution for the instability of wet earth under the dry surface, mudslides or even flashfloods from ice and snow that was melting and thawing, Noah waited. Further, the world was no doubt barren and forbidding, vegetation would have been slowly recovering, and perhaps not enough for the animals. Perhaps out of preparations that had to be made to release the animals in the right way at the right time, he waits almost a full two months.

This was indeed a new world.

Henry Morris suggests at 10 ways that the world was physically different after the Flood:

- 1) The oceans were more extensive, containing much more water, water from the Flood.
- 2) The land areas were much smaller, and a much greater portion of its surface were uninhabitable.
- 3) If there had been a thermal vapour blanket, it was now gone, so now strong temperature difference became strong, and the poles began to build up snow and ice.
- 4) Mountain ranges had been lifted up, making the world's topography much more rugged.
- 5) Winds, storms, rain and snow was now possible and a fact of life.
- 6) Possibly there was now more solar radiation reaching the earth, and beginning to decrease the longevity of man's life.
- 7) Huge glaciers, rivers and lakes existed for a time, before reducing in size.
- 8) The earth's crust was now more unstable, and vulnerable to earthquakes and volcanoes.
- 9) The land was fairly barren until vegetation could sprout and regrow.
- 10) Possibly even the earth's rotation had sped up slightly.

Added to Morris' list, many suggest this was the era of the so-called Ice Age. A world after a Flood was be vastly cooler, as ice accumulated on the poles, and even formed land bridges between continents. And beside the many carcasses littering the land, under their feet were layers of sedimentary with buried animals, now hardening into sedimentary rock through the cementing agents dissolved into them by the Flood.

And now, the command from God comes.

¹⁴ And in the second month, on the twenty-seventh day of the month, the earth was dried. ¹⁵ Then God spoke to Noah, saying, ¹⁶ "Go out of the ark, you and your wife, and your sons and your sons' wives with you. ¹⁷ Bring out with you every living thing of all flesh that *is* with you: birds and cattle and every creeping thing that creeps on the earth, so that they may abound on the earth, and be fruitful and multiply on the earth." ¹⁸ So Noah went out, and his sons and his wife and his sons' wives with him. ¹⁹ Every animal, every creeping thing, every bird, *and* whatever creeps on the earth, according to their families, went out of the ark.

Just as the command to enter the Ark came from God, now the command to exit comes from Him as well. Noah is to steadily and carefully release everything that was in the Ark. Some will no doubt come out by themselves. But many others would have to be carefully released. And now that there are far fewer animals, the balance between predator and prey would also have to be managed. This is day 371 since the Flood began, and almost certainly there are

more animals on the Ark than entered. And these younger animals also have to be carefully released to not be trampled or preyed upon or succumb to new dangers.

Noah obeys, and brings out birds, land animals, reptiles, every creature aboard the Ark. Noah, his wife, his three sons and their wives all leave the Ark.

And the first act by Noah upon leaving the Ark is one of worship.

²⁰ Then Noah built an altar to the LORD, and took of every clean animal and of every clean bird, and offered burnt offerings on the altar. ²¹ And the LORD smelled a soothing aroma.

Probably more than any time in history, Noah felt the cost of sacrifice. There are not many animals left. And these are burnt offerings, meaning he and his family are not going to eat them, but offer the whole thing up to God. Noah offers one of every clean animal and clean bird. These were the kind that Noah had taken seven of each. Noah offers God more than a tithe of his own future food. He offers one seventh of what he will need.

Why did he make this offering? It doesn't say it was for sin or for atonement, so it appears to have been a kind of peace or thanksgiving offering. This is all that is left of humanity, the only family on earth, pledging their gratitude, faith, and loyalty to the living God. But it is certainly a picture of what sacrifice always pictures, a substitute's death in exchange for life, the wrath of God assuaged and satisfied by the substitutionary death of an innocent – it is a picture of what Christ's death will do for the wrath of God against the world.

Our text says that the Lord smelled a soothing aroma. This is one of those moments when Scripture ascribes to God a human attribute, like hands, eyes, mouth, or a human experience like taste, walk, laugh. Of course, a burnt offering did have a particular aroma. But the idea is not that God happened to be where the aroma was and smelt it. The idea is that the sacrifice, the act of faith and devotion was pleasing to God. The sacrifice pictured the one-day coming Messiah, whose perfect life would atone for sin.

That Noah and his family would give up what would soon become needed food in an act of trusting devotion, and thanksgiving and loyalty, this was pleasing to God. This was more evidence that Noah really had found grace in the sight of the Lord, that he had lived a separated, holy life in contrast to his culture.

In response to this picture of the Gospel, and this act of faith by Noah, God made a commitment here, one known only to Himself and then revealed to the author of this Scripture. This was not a public commitment or covenant, but a personal decision:

Then the LORD said in His heart, "I will never again curse the ground for man's sake, although the imagination of man's heart *is* evil from his youth; nor will I again destroy every living thing as I have done. ²² "While the earth remains, Seedtime and harvest, Cold and heat, Winter and summer, And day and night Shall not cease." (Genesis 8:20–22)

Is this God regretting His action? Is this God saying He overreacted and won't do that again? No, don't read human fallibility into God's Words. Man's rebellion will go on, but the Lord will not allow evil to reach the epidemic proportions they did before the Flood, necessitating a cleansing of the whole earth. Instead, man's depravity will actually require the mercy which God announces here.

First, God will not curse the ground again. It was cursed once under Adam, and a second time under Cain. But God will not curse it again.

Second, God will not bring about a global cataclysm again. The Lord graciously and kindly saying that in the human story, He will never again wipe out all of humanity with a global Flood. The word “although” shows that God is being merciful. As Wiersbe paraphrase, “Yes, they deserve judgment because their hearts are wicked. And to persist in sin and not learn their lesson from this flood only shows how evil they are. But in grace, I will not send another flood or curse the ground.”

Instead, the Lord says He will allow human history to unfold according to cycles: planting and reaping, times of cold and hot, seasons of winter and summer. Human life will follow predictable cycles until the very end of human history. There will be a seven-year tribulation that comes upon the earth, but there will never again be a global catastrophe. Even through the terrifying time of the Tribulation, even into the millennial kingdom, the earth will follow a regularity and a stability presided over by the sovereignty of God.

We should remember that when some alarmist people, both Christian and non-Christian predict the end of humanity through global warming, or a magnetic pole shift, or a solar flare, or a meteor strike, or a super-volcano. No, God says, until the moment when this earth's history is over, and God recreates a new heaven and a new heart, this earth will have its predictable cycles of life.

God mercifully gave a new Adamic family a new start on a new world that would have predictable, stable routines in which man can repent and turn to God. This was mercy.

And that returns us to our beginning, that God's mercies are new every morning. God gave the world a second chance, and continues to give us new mercies each day, inviting us to pray, “give us today our daily bread”, reminding us that 'sufficient for the day is the evil thereof', reminding us that, “As your days, so shall your strength be” (Deut. 33:25). The predictable cycle of day and night, weeks, months, seasons, years, is proof that God has been merciful, and has given us predictable, repeating cycles and routines in which to live our lives, to rededicate ourselves, to confess our sins, and begin again the next day. That's why the famous hymn goes:

Summer and winter and springtime and harvest,
Sun, moon, and stars in their courses above
Join with all nature in manifold witness
To thy great faithfulness, mercy, and love.

God gives new beginnings even though “ the imagination of man's heart *is* evil from his youth”. So we can look at the Flood, at the post-Flood world, at our regular and routined lives and say with the psalmist, “Morning by morning new mercies I see. All I have needed thy hand hast provided; Great is thy faithfulness, Lord unto me.”