

INTRODUCTION TO GENESIS CHAPTER 8

In the close of the foregoing chapter we left the world in ruins and the church in straits; but in this chapter we have the repair of the one and the enlargement of the other. Now the scene alters, and another face of things begins to be presented to us, and the brighter side of that cloud which there appeared so black and dark; for, though God contend long, he will not contend for ever, nor be always wrath. We have here,

I. The earth made anew, by the recess of the waters, and the appearing of the dry land, now a second time, and both gradual.

1. The increase of the waters is stayed, [#Ge 8:1-2](#).
2. They begin sensibly to abate, [#Ge 8:3](#).
3. After sixteen days' ebbing, the ark rests, [#Ge 8:4](#).
4. After sixty days' ebbing, the tops of the mountains appeared above water, [#Ge 8:5](#).
5. After forty days' ebbing, and twenty days before the mountains appeared, Noah began to send out his spies, a raven and a dove, to gain intelligence, [#Ge 8:6-12](#).
6. Two months after the appearing of the tops of the mountains, the waters had gone, and the face of the earth was dry ([#Ge 8:13](#)), though not dried so as to be fit for man till almost two months after, [#Ge 8:14](#).

II. Man placed anew upon the earth, in which,

1. Noah's discharge and departure out of the ark, [#Ge 8:15-19](#).
2. His sacrifice of praise, which he offered to God upon his enlargement, [#Ge 8:20](#).
3. God's acceptance of his sacrifice, and the promise he made thereupon not to drown the world again, [#Ge 8:21,22](#). And thus, at length, mercy rejoices against judgment.

Ver. 1.

Here is,

I. An act of God's grace: *God remembered Noah and every living thing*. This is an expression after the manner of men; for not any of his creatures ([#Lu 12:6](#)), much less any of his people, are forgotten of God, [#Is 49:15,16](#). but,

1. The whole race of mankind, except Noah and his family, was now extinguished, and driven into the land of forgetfulness, to be remembered no more; so that God's remembering Noah was the return of his mercy to mankind, of whom he would not make a full end. It is a strange expression, [#Eze 5:13](#), *When I have accomplished my fury in them, I will be comforted*. The demands of divine justice had been answered by the ruin of those sinners; he had eased him of his adversaries ([#Isa 1:24](#)), and now his spirit was quieted ([#Zec 6:8](#)), and *he remembered Noah and every living thing*. He remembered mercy in wrath ([#Hab 3:2](#)), remembered the days of old ([#Isa 63:11](#)), remembered the holy seed, and then remembered Noah.
2. Noah himself, though one that had found grace in the eyes of the Lord, yet seemed to

be forgotten in the ark, and perhaps began to think himself so; for we do not find that God had told him how long he should be confined and when he should be released. Very good men have sometimes been ready to conclude themselves forgotten of God, especially when their afflictions have been unusually grievous and long. Perhaps Noah, though a great believer, yet when he found the flood continuing so long after it might reasonably be presumed to have done its work, was tempted to fear lest he that shut him in would keep him in, and began to expostulate. *How long wilt thou forget me?* But at length God returned in mercy to him, and this is expressed by remembering him. Note, Those that remember God shall certainly be remembered by him, how desolate and disconsolate soever their condition may be. He will appoint them a set time and remember them, [#Job 14:13](#).

3. With Noah, God remembered every living thing; for, though his delight is especially in the sons of men, yet he rejoices in all his works, and hates nothing that he has made. He takes special care, not only of his people's persons, but of their possessions--of them and all that belongs to them. He considered the cattle of Nineveh, [#Jon 4:11](#).

II. An act of God's power over wind and water, both of which are at his beck, though neither of them is under man's control. Observe,

1. He commanded the wind, and said to that, Go, and it went, in order to the carrying off of the flood: *God made a wind to pass over the earth*. See here,

(1.) What was God's remembrance of Noah: it was his relieving him. Note: Those whom God remembers he remembers effectually, for good; he remembers us to save us, that we may remember him to serve him.

(2.) What a sovereign dominion God has over the winds. He has them in his fist ([#Pr 30:4](#)) and brings them out of his treasuries, [#Ps 135:7](#). He sends them when, and whither, and for what purposes, he pleases. Even stormy winds fulfil his word, [#Ps 148:8](#). It should seem, while the waters increased, there was no wind; for that would have added to the toss of the ark; but now God sent a wind, when it would not be so troublesome. Probably, it was a north wind, for that drives away rain. However, it was a drying wind, such a wind as God sent to divide the Red Sea before Israel, [#Ex 14:21](#).

2. He remanded the waters, and said to them, *Come*, and they came.

(1.) He took away the cause. He sealed up the springs of those waters, *the fountains of the great deep, and the windows of heaven*. Note,

[1.] As God has a key to open, so he has a key to shut up again, and to stay the progress of judgments by stopping the causes of them: and the same hand that brings the desolation must bring the deliverance; to that hand therefore our eye must ever be. He that wounds is alone able to heal. See [#Job 12:14,15](#).

[2.] When afflictions have done the work for which they are sent, whether killing work or curing work, they shall be removed. God's word shall not return void, [#Isa 55:10,11](#).

(2.) Then the effect ceased; not all at once, but by degrees: *The waters abated* ([#Ge 8:1](#)), *returned from off the earth continually*, Heb. *they were going and returning* ([#Ge 8:3](#)), which denotes a gradual departure. The heat of the sun exhaled much, and perhaps the subterraneous caverns soaked in more. Note, As the earth was not drowned in a day, so it was not dried in a day. In the creation, it was but one day's work to clear the earth from the waters that covered it, and to make it dry land; nay, it was but half a day's work, [#Ge](#)

1:9,10. But, the work of creation being finished, this work of providence was effected by the concurring influence of second causes, yet thus enforced by the almighty power of God. God usually works deliverance for his people gradually, that the day of small things may not be despised, nor the day of great things despaired of, **#Zec 4:10**. See **#Pr 4:18**.

Ver. 4.

Here we have the effects and evidences of the ebbing of the waters.

1. The ark rested. This was some satisfaction to Noah, to feel the house he was in upon firm ground, and no longer movable. It rested upon a mountain, whither it was directed, not by Noah's prudence (he did not steer it), but by the wise and gracious providence of God, that it might rest the sooner. Note, God has times and places of rest for his people after their tossings; and many a time he provides for their seasonable and comfortable settlement without their own contrivance and quite beyond their own foresight. The ark of the church, though sometimes tossed with tempests, and not comforted (**#Isa 54:11**), yet has its rests, **#Ac 9:31**.
2. The tops of the mountains were seen, like little islands, appearing above the water. We must suppose that they were seen by Noah and his sons; for there were none besides to see them. It is probable that they had looked through the window of the ark every day, like the longing mariners, after a tedious voyage, to see if they could discover land, or as the prophet's servant (**#1Ki 18:43,44**), and at length they spy ground, and enter the day of the discovery in their journal. They felt ground above forty days before they saw it, according to Dr. Lightfoot's computation, whence he infers that, if the waters decreased proportionably, the ark drew eleven cubits in water.

Ver. 6.

We have here an account of the spies which Noah sent forth to bring him intelligence from abroad, a raven and a dove. Observe here,

I. That though God had told Noah particularly when the flood would come, even to a day (**#Ge 7:4**), yet he did not give him a particular account by revelation at what times, and by what steps, it should *go away*,

1. Because the knowledge of the former was necessary to his preparing the ark, and settling himself in it; but the knowledge of the latter would serve only to gratify his curiosity, and the concealing of it from him would be the needful exercise of his faith and patience. And,
2. He could not foresee the flood, but by revelation; but he might, by ordinary means, discover the decrease of it, and therefore God was pleased to leave him to the use of them.

II. That though Noah by faith expected his enlargement, and by patience waited for it, yet he was inquisitive concerning it, as one that thought it long to be thus confined. Note, Desires of release out of trouble, earnest expectations of it, and enquiries concerning its advances towards us, will very well consist with the sincerity of faith and patience. *He that believes does not make haste* to run before God, but he does make haste to go forth to meet him, **#Isa 28:16**. Particularly,

1. Noah sent forth a raven through the window of the ark, which went forth, as the

Hebrew phrase is, *going forth and returning*, that is, flying about, and feeding on the carcasses that floated, but returning to the ark for rest; probably not in it, but upon it. This gave Noah little satisfaction; therefore,

2. He sent forth a dove, which returned the first time with no good news, but probably wet and dirty; but, the second time, she brought an olive-leaf in her bill, which appeared to be first plucked off, a plain indication that now the trees, the fruit trees, began to appear above water. Note here,

(1.) That Noah sent forth the dove the second time seven days after the first time, and the third time was after seven days too; and probably the first sending of her out was seven days after the sending forth of the raven. This intimates that it was done on the sabbath day, which, it should seem, Noah religiously observed in the ark. Having kept the sabbath in a solemn assembly of his little church, he then expected special blessings from heaven, and enquired concerning them. Having directed his prayer, he looked up, **#Ps 5:3**.

(2.) The dove is an emblem of a gracious soul, which finding no rest for its foot, no solid peace or satisfaction in this world, this deluged defiling world, returns to Christ as to its ark, as to its Noah. The carnal heart, like the raven, takes up with the world, and feeds on the carrions it finds there; *but return thou to thy rest, O my soul, to thy Noah*, so the word is, **#Ps 116:7**. *O that I had wings like a dove, to flee to him!* **#Ps 55:6**. And as Noah put forth his hand, and took the dove, and pulled her in to him, into the ark, so Christ will graciously preserve, and help, and welcome, those that fly to him for rest.

(3.) The olive branch, which was an emblem of peace, was brought, not by the raven, a bird of prey, nor by a gay and proud peacock, but by a mild, patient, humble dove. It is a dove-like disposition that brings into the world earnestness of rest and joy.

(4.) Some make these things an allegory. The law was first sent forth like the raven, but brought no tidings of the assuaging of the waters of God's wrath, with which the world of mankind was deluged; therefore, in the fulness of time, God sent forth his gospel, as the dove, in the likeness of which the Holy Spirit descended, and this presents us with an olive branch and brings in a better hope.

Ver. 13.

Here is,

1. The ground dry (**#Ge 8:13**), that is, all the water carried off it, which, upon the first day of the first month (a joyful new year's- day it was), Noah was himself an eye witness of. He *removed the covering of the ark*, not the whole covering, but so much as would suffice to give him a prospect of the earth about it; and a most comfortable prospect he had. For behold, behold and wonder, *the face of the ground was dry*. Note,

(1.) It is a great mercy to see ground about us. Noah was more sensible of it than we are; for mercies restored are much more affecting than mercies continued.

(2.) The divine power which now renewed the face of the earth can renew the face of an afflicted troubled soul and of a distressed persecuted church. He can make dry ground to appear even where it seemed to have been lost and forgotten, **#Ps 18:16**.

2. The ground dried (**#Ge 8:14**), so as to be a fit habitation for Noah. Observe, Though Noah saw the ground dry the first day of the first month, yet God would not suffer him to go out of the ark till the twenty seventh day of the second month. Perhaps Noah,

being somewhat weary of his restraint, would have quitted the ark at first; but God, in kindness to him, ordered him to stay so much longer. Note, God consults our benefit rather than our desires; for he knows what is good for us better than we do for ourselves, and how long it is fit our restraints should continue and desired mercies should be delayed. We would go out of the ark before the ground is dried: and perhaps, if the door be shut, are ready to remove the covering, and to climb up some other way; but we should be satisfied that God's time of showing mercy is certainly the best time, when the mercy is ripe for us and we are ready for it.

Ver. 15.

Here is,

I. Noah's dismissal out of the ark, **#Ge 8:15-17**. Observe,

1. Noah did not stir till God bade him. As he had a command to go into the ark (**#Ge 7:1**), so, how tedious soever his confinement there was, he would wait for a command to go out of it again. Note, We must in all our ways acknowledge God, and set him before us in all our removes. Those only go under God's protection that follow God's direction and submit to his government. Those that steadily adhere to God's word as their rule, and are guided by his grace as their principle, and take hints from his providence to assist them in their application of general directions to particular cases, may in faith see him guiding their motions in their march through this wilderness.
2. Though God detained him long, yet at last he gave him his discharge; for *the vision is for an appointed time, and at the end it shall speak*, it shall speak truth (**#Hab 2:3**), it shall not lie.
3. God had said, *Come into the ark*, which he says, not, *Come forth*, but, *Go forth*, which intimates that God, who went in with him, staid with him all the while, till he sent him out safely; for he has said, *I will not leave thee*.
4. Some observe that, when they were ordered into the ark, the men and the women were mentioned separately (**#Ge 6:18**): *Thou, and thy sons, and thy wife, and thy sons' wives*; hence they infer that, during the time of mourning, they were apart, and their wives apart, **#Zec 12:12**. But now God as it were new-married them again, sending out Noah and his wife together, and his sons and their wives together, that they might be fruitful and multiply.
5. Noah was ordered to bring the creatures out with him, that having taken the care of feeding them so long, and been at so much pains about them, he might have the honour of leading them forth by their armies, and receiving their homage.

II. Noah's departure when he had his dismissal. As he would not go out without leave, so he would not, out of fear or humour, stay in when he had leave, but was in all points observant of the heavenly vision. Though he had been now a full year and ten days a prisoner in the ark, yet when he found himself preserved there, not only for a new life, but for a new world, he saw no reason to complain of his long confinement. Now observe,

1. Noah and his family came out alive, though one of them was a wicked Ham, whom, though he escaped the flood, God's justice could have taken away by some other stroke. But they are all alive. Note, When families have been long continued together, and no breaches made among them, it must be looked upon as a distinguishing

favour, and attributed to the Lord's mercies.

2. Noah brought out all the creatures that went in with him, except the raven and the dove, which, probably, were ready to meet their mates at their coming out. Noah was able to give a very good account of his charge; for of all that were given to him he had lost none, but was faithful to him that appointed him, *pro hac vice--on this occasion*, high steward of his household.

Ver. 20.

Here is,

I. Noah's thankful acknowledgment of God's favour to him, in completing the mercy of his deliverance, **#Ge 8:20**.

1. He *built an altar*. Hitherto he had done nothing without particular instructions and commands from God. He had a particular call into the ark, and another out of it; but, altars and sacrifices being already of divine institution for religious worship, he did not stay for a particular command thus to express his thankfulness. Those that have received mercy from God should be forward in returning thanks, and do it *not of constraint, but willingly*. God is pleased with free will offerings, and praises that wait for him. Noah was now turned out into a cold and desolate world, where, one would have thought, his first care would have been to build a house for himself; but, behold, he begins with an altar for God: God, that is the first, must be first served; and he begins well that begins with God.

2. He offered a sacrifice upon his altar, *of every clean beast, and of every clean fowl--one, the odd seventh* that we read of, **#Ge 7:2,3**. Here observe,

(1.) He offered only those that were clean; for it is not enough that we sacrifice, but we must sacrifice that which God appoints, according to the law of sacrifice, and not a corrupt thing.

(2.) Though his stock of cattle was so small, and that rescued from ruin at so great an expense of care and pains, yet he did not grudge to give God his dues out of it. He might have said,

"Have I but seven sheep to begin the world with, and must one of these seven be killed and burnt for sacrifice? Were it not better to defer it till we have greater plenty?"

No, to prove the sincerity of his love and gratitude, he cheerfully gives the seventh to his God, as an acknowledgment that all was his, and owing to him. Serving God with our little is the way to make it more; and we must never think that wasted with which God is honoured.

(3.) See here the antiquity of religion: the first thing we find done in the new world was an act of worship, **#Jer 6:16**. We are now to express our thankfulness, not by burnt-offerings, but by the sacrifices of praise and the sacrifices of righteousness, by pious devotions and a pious conversation.

II. God's gracious acceptance of Noah's thankfulness. It was a settled rule in the patriarchal age: *If thou doest well, shalt thou not be accepted?* Noah was so. For,

1. God was well-pleased with the performance, **#Ge 8:21**. He *smelt a sweet savour*, or, as it is in the Hebrew, *a savour of rest*, from it. As, when he had made the world at first on the seventh day, he rested and was refreshed, so, now that he had new-made it, in the sacrifice of the seventh he rested. He was well pleased with Noah's pious zeal, and these hopeful beginnings of the new world, as men are with fragrant and agreeable smells; though his offering was small it was according to his ability, and God accepted it. Having caused his anger to rest upon the world of sinners, he here caused his love to rest upon this little remnant of believers.
2. Hereupon, he took up a resolution never to drown the world again. Herein he had an eye, not so much to Noah's sacrifice as to Christ's sacrifice of himself, which was typified and represented by it, and which was indeed an *offering of a sweet-smelling savour*, **#Eph 5:2**. Good security is here given, and that which may be relied upon,

(1.) That this judgment should never be repeated. Noah might think,

"To what purpose should the world be repaired, when, in all probability, for the wickedness of it, it will quickly be in like manner ruined again?"

"No," says God, "it never shall."

It was said (**#Ge 6:6**), *It repented the Lord that he had made man*; now here he speaks as if it repented him that he had destroyed man: neither means a change of his mind, but both a change of his way. *It repented him concerning his servants*, **#De 32:36**. Two ways this resolve is expressed:--

[1.] *I will not again curse the ground*, Heb. *I will not add to curse the ground any more*. God had cursed the ground upon the first entrance of sin (**#Ge 3:17**), when he drowned it he added to that curse; but now he determines not to add to it any more.

[2.] *Neither will I again smite any more every living thing*; that is, it was determined that whatever ruin God might bring upon particular persons, or families, or countries, he would never again destroy the whole world till the day shall come when time shall be no more. But the reason of this resolve is very surprising, for it seems the same in effect with the reason given for the destruction of the world: *Because the imagination of man's heart is evil from his youth*, **#Ge 6:5**. But there is this difference--there it is said, *The imagination of man's heart is evil continually*, that is,

"his actual transgressions continually cry against him;"

here it is said, *It is evil from his youth or childhood*. It is bred in the bone; he brought it into the world with him; he was shapen and conceived in it. Now, one would think it should follow,

"Therefore that guilty race shall be wholly extinguished, and *I will make a full end*."

No,

"Therefore I will no more take this severe method; for," First,

"He is rather to be pitied, for it is all the effect of sin dwelling in him; and it is but what might be expected from such a degenerate race: he is called a *transgressor from the womb*, and therefore it is not strange that he deals so very treacherously,"

#Isa 48:8. Thus God *remembers that he is flesh, corrupt and sinful*, **#Ps 78:39.** Secondly,

"He will be utterly ruined; for, if he be dealt with according to his deserts, one flood must succeed another till all be destroyed."

See here,

1. That outward judgments, though they may terrify and restrain men, yet cannot of themselves sanctify and renew them; the grace of God must work with those judgments. Man's nature was as sinful after the deluge as it had been before.
2. That God's goodness takes occasion from man's sinfulness to magnify itself the more; his reasons of mercy are all drawn from himself, not from any thing in us.

(2.) That the course of nature should never be discontinued (**#Ge 8:22**):

"While the earth remaineth, and man upon it, there shall be summer and winter (not all winter as had been this last year), day and night,"

not all night, as probably it was while the rain was descending. Here,

[1.] It is plainly intimated that this earth is not to remain always; it, and all the works in it, must shortly be burnt up; and we look for *new heavens and a new earth*, when all these things must be dissolved. But,

[2.] As long as it does remain God's providence will carefully preserve the regular succession of times and seasons, and cause each to know its place. To this we owe it that the world stands, and the wheel of nature keeps it track. See here how changeable the times are and yet how unchangeable. *First*, The course of nature always changing. As it is with the times, so it is with the events of time, they are subject to vicissitudes--*day and night, summer and winter*, counter changed. In heaven and hell it is not so, but on earth *God hath set the one over against the other. Secondly*, Yet never changed. It is constant in this inconstancy. These seasons have never ceased, nor shall cease, while the sun continued such a steady measurer of time and the moon such a *faithful witness in heaven*. This is *God's covenant of the day and of the night*, the stability of which is mentioned for the confirming of our faith in the covenant of grace, which is no less inviolable, **#Jer 33:20,21**. We see God's promises to the creatures made good, and thence may infer that his promises to all believers shall be so.