

seems lost in detail until we see the wider picture. Ask the Lord to help you see the wider picture of your own life's story.

- Pray for those who find it impossible to obtain any real understanding of what is happening to them. Pray for people you know who avoid asking the deeper questions of life because they fear the answers. Pray for the Lord's wisdom.

Final Prayer

Lord God, You have seen and heard Your people commit, struggle and confess their sins for centuries; come rushing through us now like a torrent of water, and by the power of Your Holy Spirit cleanse us, and make us victorious over all the powers of evil. Thank You Lord God: AMEN

Prayer

Jesus, my Lord, I have faith in You, but I am too hesitant in putting it into practice. Inspire me therefore by the exploits of great Christians of the past, open my heart to rejoice in Your answers to my prayers, and encourage me to stand firm according to the faith You have given me. Then let me be bold in You, my Lord; AMEN

Other Prayer Suggestions

Weekly Theme: Vision

Pray for God's people to catch a renewed vision of the call of the Gospel in every part of the world. Pray that barriers may come down in the name of Jesus Christ our Lord.

On-going prayers

- Give thanks for the beauty of music and the arts
- Pray for those who are suffering in extremes of weather
- Pray for peace in the ongoing civil war within Sri Lanka

Meditation

Don't stand back:

Don't let others try to do for you
what Your Lord would have you do,
So you will grow in confidence
as a loved and trusted servant.

Don't let feelings be quickly swayed,
dare to take the hand of Christ,
And draw empowerment from His love
which gives you strength and courage.

Don't let the tempter catch you blind
keep alert, keep constant watch,
Then take control of every thought
so nothing tempts you backwards.

Don't let the world become your idol
never seek is slavish means,
Be free to choose the paths of truth
And live by the Word of God.

Bible Study - Genesis 7:13-24

¹³ On that exact same day Noah entered the Ark with his sons, Shem and Ham and Japheth, and Noah's wife and the three wives of his sons, ¹⁴ they had with them every species of wild animal, and each species of domestic animals and ground creatures, and each species of bird, everything that flies or has wings.

¹⁵ Pairs of every kind of creature with the breath of life in them went into the ark with Noah. ¹⁶ Those that entered were male and female of every kind, and they came just as God had commanded Noah. Then God shut him in.

¹⁷ The flood kept coming on the earth for forty days. The waters rose and lifted the Ark, and it floated up above the earth; ¹⁸ and the waters increased and swelled high over the earth, and the Ark drifted on top of the waters. ¹⁹ The waters rose extremely high over the earth so that all the high mountains under the entire heavens were covered; ²⁰ and reached their peak fifteen cubits above the mountain tops.

²¹ And everything that moved on the earth; birds, domestic animals, wild animals, all creatures on the ground, and all human beings, they all perished. ²² Everything on dry land that breathed, died. ²³ He wiped out everything that existed on the earth; people and animals and creatures and birds of the air; they were obliterated from the earth. Only Noah was left, and those that were with him in the Ark. ²⁴ The waters covered the earth for one hundred fifty days.

Review

As soon as we read this part of the story of the Flood, we begin to realise that we have read this before. Yesterday we read that God told Noah and his family to enter the Ark (7:1 and 7:6,7) and here, the instruction is repeated (7:13). The animals entered the ark (7:2-5), and they do so again, it seems, here (7:14f.) but the instructions are slightly different. Clearly, we are being told different things about the story of the Flood, perhaps about God's direction and control of events, but the arrangement of the whole story seems odd to us.

The story structure If you have followed this series of studies, you will know that from time to time I point out that a story has a structure called 'chiastic'. It may be that different elements of the story have come from various ancient roots, perhaps stories told in different tribes or parts of Israel, but at some point, it was all written down in this form. The structure outlined below may be unfamiliar to us, but because of the way that it builds up to a climax and then unravels, it is highly memorable and designed for times when such great events were celebrated in the telling rather than the recording of them.

A typical scholarly analysis of this is found in Wenham's 'Word' Biblical Commentary (Nelson 1985) and is easily seen when presented in the manner below:

Transition and Introduction (6:9-10)

A Violence in Creation (6:11-12)

B First divine speech: the resolve to destroy (6:13-22)

C Second divine speech: 'enter the Ark' (7:1-10)

D Beginning of the Flood (7:11-16)

E The rising of the Flood (7:17-24)

God remembered Noah (8:1)

E* The receding Flood (8:1-5)

D* Drying of the earth (8:6-14)

C* Third divine speech: 'leave the Ark' (8:15-19)

B* God's resolve to preserve order (8:20-22)

A* Fourth divine speech: the Covenant (9:1-17)

Transitional conclusion (9:18-19)

A story of salvation A number of things arise directly from this analysis. Firstly, the repetition we see suggests that God is in control of a sequence of events which achieves His goal of saving His Creation, and this is indicated largely in His speeches. Secondly, at the heart of the story are the words 'God remembered Noah' (Gen 8:1). This is part of tomorrow's reading, but we can see here that these words express the heart of God to save His people, as they do in many parts of the Old Testament (see Ex 2:24 where God remembers His people Israel under the cruelty of the Egyptian Pharaohs).

Finally, this structure illustrates something to which we will return when we reach the end of the story of the Flood. Chiastic stories characteristically end where they began. In this case, the story began with the wickedness of people. At the end of the story, however, a series of speeches of God tells us that people have not changed, and the sons of Noah are hardly better than those who were not saved (see 8:21, 9:18ff). Salvation has come, for Noah and the ancient world, at the cost of the Flood; but sins remain and will only be defeated finally at the cost of a great deal more!

Some details of today's passage We can see some of this within the passage we have read today. For example, God saved Noah by shutting him in (7:16) to the ark for protection; God closed the door, not Noah! He was enclosed with a selection of all living things whilst the world below perished in sin, but being in the ark was an expression of faith, because Noah did not control it. The Ark was in God's control and it had no steering or power, and no windows for anyone to see what was happening around. The opening (6:16) was in the roof only, perhaps a skylight. Those inside were at the mercy of God for salvation, and those in the Flood below (7:22f.) were at God's mercy for judgement. God's work here was black and white; life or death; salvation or annihilation. No wonder the Church of God has been likened traditionally to an 'Ark of Salvation'!

Everywhere today, the church too often presents itself as a ship of many colours, as if salvation was like the rainbow at the end of the story of the Flood instead of the ark. In this way, it tries to appeal to different cultures, instead of starting at the beginning of the story and directing people into the Ark of salvation through Jesus Christ. The traditional Biblical image of the Ark is the only place to start for God's salvation, for it points us to the absolute decisions we have to make before God who is our Maker. The rainbow at the end of the Flood story tells us about the character of God, not salvation or the mission of the church.

Questions *(for use in groups)*

1. How would people categorise life forms to be saved in the event of a flood today, and how and why would this be different from scripture?
2. What do the numbers mentioned in this text indicate to us about the story?
3. Is the Ark a helpful or unhelpful image of the Church today? List out the positives and the negatives.

Discipleship

Personal comment:

The study today indicates a number of challenges for faith and discipleship. Which of these affects you? Were you expecting such challenges from this text? I ask this because we often think we know a passage of scripture and really, we do not. Any implication that we already know what there is to know about a text is always dangerous! The challenge of today's passage is perhaps to go back to look again at famous texts we think we know and try sincerely to look into them with fresh eyes to see what God is saying to us. I do suggest this is done with a book of reference, because these can help us begin to see interesting things even if we profoundly disagree with some of the conclusions drawn by a particular author.

Ideas for discipleship programme

- *There may well be difficult things happening in your life, and it become hard to obtain a focus on what God is doing to lead you through; like the story today which*