

Unit I: The Genesis of Altars and Sacrifices

The Rainbow Promise

DEVOTIONAL READING: Psalm 77:1-2, 7-19

BACKGROUND SCRIPTURES: Genesis 6:1–9:17

PRINT PASSAGES: Genesis 8:13-22; 9:11-13

KEY VERSE

I do set my bow in the cloud, and it shall be for a token of a covenant between me and the earth. (Genesis 9:13, KJV)

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“I have set my rainbow in the clouds, and it will be the sign of the covenant between me and the earth.” (Genesis 9:13, NIV)

Lesson Aims

As a result of experiencing this lesson, you should be able to do the following:

- Take a deep dive into the broader context that called forth Noah’s worship.
- Empathize with Noah’s felt need to worship.
- Identify an aspect of Noah’s worship of God and adapt it for use in your congregation.

*Key Terms

Ark (8:16)—Hebrew: *tebah* (tay-baw’): a box, chest, basket; the vessel which saved Noah and his family, with animals, during the Flood.

Built (8:20)—Hebrew: *banah* (baw-naw’): assembled; constructed; made; “build-ed” (KJV).

Dried (8:14)—Hebrew: *yabesh* (yaw-bashe’): dried up; withered; became dry; “was completely dry” (NIV).

Family (8:19)—Hebrew: *mishpachah* (mish-paw-khaw’): a clan; every family; tribe; relative; “kinds” (KJV); “kind” (NIV).

Fruitful (8:17)—Hebrew: *parah* (paw-raw’): to bear fruit; flourishing; increasing.

Waters (9:11)—Hebrew: *mayim* (mah’-yim): water; flood; a pool; a spring or well.

***(Word Study Supplement—Refer to page 2)**



The Biblical Context

The biblical context of this lesson is set against the backdrop of the beginning of humanity's history after Adam and Eve's sin and subsequent separation from God. The consequences and escalation of sin became prominent after Cain murdered his brother Abel and was banished from his family and God's presence, and was condemned to a life of wandering (Genesis 4). Genesis 5 records humanity's genealogical record from Adam through his godly son Seth, to his great-grandson Noah and his sons. Regrettably, as humanity's population grew, so did sin, so much so that God decided to cleanse the earth with a great flood (see Genesis 6). However, Noah found favor with God because of his righteousness and was instructed to build an ark to preserve life through his family and a pair of every living creature on the earth. Genesis 7 details this great flood after Noah completed and boarded the ark. This flood was God's judgment of a world corrupted by humanity's sin and rebellion against Him. All of humanity and every living creature on the earth then paid the ultimate price for sin, except those inside the ark. However, Genesis 8 reveals God's plans for a new beginning for humanity and the world He created. In Genesis 9, God sealed His promise of a new beginning with a new unconditional covenant and a visible sign (the rainbow) that He would honor His promise perpetually.

Introduction

Although worship is for God and not the worshippers, it has essential benefits for those who learn to worship Him in spirit and in truth. For one thing, God-centered worship focuses our minds on spiritual things and reminds us where our true citizenship is—heavenly places. Second, when we engage in authentic worship, our focus is Godward and not on ourselves or our current situation. Another benefit of worship is our positioning ourselves to receive God's guidance as we enter His presence and open our hearts and minds to Him.

Along with these and other benefits, there are some specific reasons for worshipping God, and one of the most significant ones is gratitude for His blessings, especially when we experience deliverance from traumatic experiences. The Old Testament records examples of God's people's building altars and offering sacrifices to worship Him as expressions of gratitude. The first significant example of this goes back to primeval history after the Flood when Noah built an altar and led his family to worship God for their deliverance after God instructed him to leave the ark.

ANALYSIS OF THE BIBLICAL TEXT

A New Beginning (Genesis 8:13-20)

KJV

13 And it came to pass in the six hundredth and first year, in the first month, the first day of the month, the waters were dried up from off the earth: and Noah removed the covering of the ark, and looked, and, behold, the face of the ground was dry.

14 And in the second month, on the seven and twentieth day of the month, was the earth dried.

15 And God spake unto Noah, saying,

16 Go forth of the ark, thou, and thy wife, and thy sons, and thy sons' wives with thee.
17 Bring forth with thee every living thing that is with thee, of all flesh, both of fowl, and of cattle, and of every creeping thing that creepeth upon the earth; that they may breed abundantly in the earth, and be fruitful, and multiply upon the earth.
18 And Noah went forth, and his sons, and his wife, and his sons' wives with him:
19 Every beast, every creeping thing, and every fowl, and whatsoever creepeth upon the earth, after their kinds, went forth out of the ark.
20 And Noah builded an altar unto the LORD; and took of every clean beast, and of every clean fowl, and offered burnt offerings on the altar.

NIV

13 By the first day of the first month of Noah's six hundred and first year, the water had dried up from the earth. Noah then removed the covering from the ark and saw that the surface of the ground was dry.

14 By the twenty-seventh day of the second month the earth was completely dry.

15 Then God said to Noah,

16 "Come out of the ark, you and your wife and your sons and their wives.

17 "Bring out every kind of living creature that is with you—the birds, the animals, and all the creatures that move along the ground—so they can multiply on the earth and be fruitful and increase in number on it."

18 So Noah came out, together with his sons and his wife and his sons' wives.

19 All the animals and all the creatures that move along the ground and all the birds—everything that moves on land—came out of the ark, one kind after another.

20 Then Noah built an altar to the LORD and, taking some of all the clean animals and clean birds, he sacrificed burnt offerings on it.

Noah was a man of great faith and patience, attested by his faithful obedience to remain in the ark until God instructed him to disembark. Although he observed that the earth's surface was dry, he patiently waited until it was completely dry—not moving until God spoke to him (**verses 13-15**). After many days, God's long-awaited instructions were to leave the ark, take his family, bring out all the animals, and multiply and replenish the earth (**verses 16-17**). However, Noah and his family did not know what to expect after surviving this catastrophe. Yet, Noah obeyed and left the ark as instructed without any noted hesitation (**verses 18-19**). When God speaks and reveals His will to us, we must obey and follow His directions immediately, even when we don't know what lies ahead. Noah and the survivors of God's catastrophic judgment were now charged with building a new life upon a sin-cleansed earth. Notably, Noah's initial responses to this new assignment were to build an altar and lead his family to worship God with a burnt offering of every clean animal—a costly sacrifice, representing the best available to be offered to God (**verse 20**).

Why did Noah choose to worship God before doing anything else? We can assume that Noah's purpose was to express gratitude to God for graciously protecting and bringing them through the Flood's devastation. Also, Noah's faith and relationship with God led him to realize that a new beginning was impossible without first ensuring that God was pleased and demonstrating total dependence on Him. There is also a picture of Jesus Christ in Noah's burnt offering sacrifice as He freely gave Himself as a sacrificial offering to free us from sin and provide us with a new beginning. Thus, we should prioritize offering God our best (i.e., the praise of our lips, our best possessions, and humble, willing spirits) in worship as expressions of our sincere gratitude.

WHAT DO YOU THINK?

What should God-centered worship be, and how can God-centered worship become the norm and not the exception as an expression of gratitude to Him, especially for deliverance from harrowing experiences?

A New Covenant (Genesis 8:21-22; 9:11-13)

KJV

21 And the LORD smelled a sweet savour; and the LORD said in his heart, I will not again curse the ground any more for man's sake; for the imagination of man's heart is evil from his youth; neither will I again smite any more every thing living, as I have done.
22 While the earth remaineth, seedtime and harvest, and cold and heat, and summer and winter, and day and night shall not cease.

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11 And I will establish my covenant with you, neither shall all flesh be cut off any more by the waters of a flood; neither shall there any more be a flood to destroy the earth.

12 And God said, This is the token of the covenant which I make between me and you and every living creature that is with you, for perpetual generations:

13 I do set my bow in the cloud, and it shall be for a token of a covenant between me and the earth.

NIV

21 The LORD smelled the pleasing aroma and said in his heart: "Never again will I curse the ground because of humans, even though every inclination of the human heart is evil from childhood. And never again will I destroy all living creatures, as I have done.

22 "As long as the earth endures, seedtime and harvest, cold and heat, summer and winter, day and night will never cease."

.....

11 "I establish my covenant with you: Never again will all life be destroyed by the waters of a flood; never again will there be a flood to destroy the earth."

12 And God said, “This is the sign of the covenant I am making between me and you and every living creature with you, a covenant for all generations to come:
13 “I have set my rainbow in the clouds, and it will be the sign of the covenant between me and the earth.”

God's purposes for the Flood were to judge humanity's widespread wickedness and provide an opportunity for renewal by salvaging a remnant of humanity and the earth's living creatures. God chose Noah and his family for this mission because of Noah's righteous standing before Him and faithful obedience (see Genesis 6:8-9). Thus, God preserved Noah and his family in the ark, allowing them to start anew in a re-created world. This opportunity for renewal also required a new covenant relationship between God and surviving humanity and the earth. After obeying God's instructions to leave the ark, Noah's initial worship set the stage for this new covenant relationship and revealed that his faith in God remained strong. Noah's sacrificial offering did not go unnoticed by God. **Verse 21** of chapter 8 figuratively describes God's initial response as “smelling its pleasing aroma,” speaking to Himself, and promising never again to curse the earth as He did through the Flood because of humanity's unchanged nature and propensity to sin (**8:21**). Further, God promised that while the earth remained in its current form, nature's natural cycles would remain unaltered and uninterrupted (**8:22**). Genesis 9:1-17 continues God's direct interaction with Noah and his sons.

God established a unilateral, unconditional covenant with Noah and all living creatures after blessing them, giving His expectations regarding how they were to live in this renewed environment and the command to reproduce and repopulate it (**9:11**). God promised never again to use a universal flood to destroy the earth or all living things and offers the rainbow as visible proof that He will keep this promise perpetually (**9:12-13**). God set His bow in the cloud, symbolizing His intention to keep His word. Each time we see a rainbow, it should remind us that (1) God is faithful and trustworthy, (2) we never have to fear the world's being destroyed by a global flood again, and (3) God is full of mercy and takes it upon Himself to be gracious to those who are obedient and seek to worship Him in spirit and in truth.

WHAT DO YOU THINK?

In light of God's covenant promises to Noah, why should we not fear that humanity will destroy our world?

A Closing Thought

After disembarking from the ark and stepping onto a renewed earth, Noah's initial response was to worship God, an act of gratitude and total commitment to Him for His gracious protection. His worship was motivated by his having an intimate relationship with God characterized by faithful obedience before, during, and after the Flood. In other words, Noah's worship “was for real” and from the heart. Likewise, we should develop and demonstrate a similar heart