

“God Remembers You”
Genesis 8:1-22

August 2, 2015

SI: We’re studying the first eleven chapters of Genesis this summer. These chapters are foundational for a Christian world view.

Out the eleven chapters, four whole chapters are devoted to Noah and the Flood—more than is even devoted to the creation account itself. This is an event of immense importance in redemptive history that we must understand and work into our thinking.

INTRO: I want to start out this morning by giving you a brief history lesson that will help you appreciate this passage we've just read.

For over 100 years, the study of the Old Testament was dominated by an idea that Bible-believing Christians like us disagreed with.

This idea was not taught or believed in conservative, evangelical colleges and seminaries.

But it was the standard teaching in virtually every other divinity school in Europe and America.

Almost all the preeminent Old Testament scholars accepted this idea.

So what was this idea? It was called the Documentary Hypothesis.

It was also called the Wellhausen Hypothesis after the German scholar Julius Wellhausen who proposed it.

The Documentary Hypothesis was that the first five books of the Bible, the Pentateuch, Genesis, Exodus, Leviticus, Numbers, Deuteronomy, are not unified writings, certainly not the work of one author, certainly not Moses. They are instead a crude patchwork of a number of different conflicting sources.

According to this theory there were different religious and political parties in Israel.

They each had their own writings with different stories that supported their views. The authors of the Pentateuch, whoever they were, took some of this document, some of that document, changed stories and details as needed, and then crammed it all together to try to make it fit.

And they didn't do a very good job of it, because it sounds clumsy to us.

Just read the story of Noah, for example. Certain details repeated and changed.

First Noah is told to bring two of every kind of animal.

Then later told to bring seven of every kind of bird and clean animal.

See, that's evidence of two different conflicting accounts.

Phrases are needlessly repeated. God says: come out, you, wife, sons, son's wives, birds, animals, all creatures that creep on ground, so Noah came out, wife, sons, son's wives, birds, animals, all creatures that creep on ground.

A single creative mind wouldn't have made that mistake.

That's evidence of two different documents or sources poorly crammed together.

So every place where the Bible sounds stiff, repetitive, or even where it changes

abruptly—switching from using one name for God to another name for him—the Documentary Hypothesis said that shows there is no unity in the Bible. How can this be God’s Word if it’s just a crude patchwork of conflicting stories? But it’s not a crude patchwork.

A new generation of Old Testament scholars have shown that all these features that the Documentary Hypothesis called crude—like repetition—are actually marks of a highly sophisticated Hebrew literary style.

The account of Noah, for example, is not a patchwork quilt of different stories, each telling it in a different way.

It is a very complex, gracefully written historical account with a structure that calls attention to its theological meaning.

Let me get more specific.

Genesis 6-9, the account of Noah and the flood, is what is called a chiasmus.

A chiasmus is a form of literature in which corresponding elements mirror each other like bookends that get closer and closer to a central point.

Let me show you what I mean. Watch my hands.

Genesis 6-9, the flood chapters,

begin with a description of Noah and the world before the flood.

They end with a description of Noah and the world after the flood.

God establishes his covenant with Noah before the flood.

God reaffirms his covenant with Noah after the flood.

Noah and his family and the animals enter the ark.

Noah and his family leave the ark.

The waters rise . . . the waters recede.

And it’s much more complicated than that.

Every detail on this side has a corresponding element on the other side.

But what’s in the dead center of the Noah story?

What’s the central detail, the central pivot on which everything turns?

It’s the first verse of chapter 8. “But God remembered Noah . . .”

So right in the middle of this catastrophe,

right in the middle of God’s terrifying judgment of man’s sin is this message:

“But God remembered Noah . . .”

This is the focal point of the entire flood story, so let’s focus on it ourselves.

God remembers you. Three questions:

1. What does it mean?
2. How is it experienced?
3. How should you respond?

MP#1 What does it mean?

To remember usually suggests that something has been forgotten.

But “God remembered Noah” doesn’t mean somehow God got busy with other things and Noah slipped his mind.

When the Bible says remember, especially when it is used in reference to God, it means acting on a previous commitment.

He acts on a promise he has made to someone.

Even more specifically, he acts on a promise made to a covenant partner to deliver him or her from trouble and secure his or her salvation.

This occurs throughout the Bible in some very important settings.

When God was about to destroy the wicked cities of Sodom and Gomorrah, he “remembered Abraham” and spared Lot on his behalf.

That was in fulfillment of his promises to Abraham on behalf of his family.

When Rachel wanted to have children but could not, the Bible says, “God remembered Rachel” and she conceived.

Again, God was acting on his promises to the family of Abraham.

When Hannah was unable to have a child, she prayed and God remembered her, so that she gave birth to Samuel, in answer to his promise to her through Eli.

When the people of Israel were in bondage in Egypt as slaves, they cried out in their pain and misery and “God heard their groaning and remembered his covenant with Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob.”

He began that series of events through Moses that led to their freedom.

Psalm 9 tells us “God remembers the afflicted.”

Psalm 136 says “God remembered us in our low estate.”

When John the Baptist was born, his father Zechariah said:

“God has raised up a horn of salvation for us to remember his holy covenant, the oath he swore to our father Abraham.”

When Mary conceived Jesus by the power of the Holy Spirit, she praised God who remembered his mercy as he had spoken to Abraham and his offspring.

And the thief on the cross asked:

“Jesus, remember me when you come in your kingdom.”

In every case, the idea is the same: God acting on his promises to his people. When it came to Noah, God kept his promise to save him and his family while rest of mankind was destroyed.

So the account of the flood is here to reveal the character of God.

He’s a holy person who hates evil. It grieves him so much, destroys all mankind. And at the same time, he’s a loving, faithful, promise-keeper who remembers the commitments he has made to his people and follows through with them.

In Easter sermon this year, you may recall I told the story of Robertson McQuilkin.

He was the president of Columbia Bible College, now Columbia International U.

It was a prominent position, he was doing a lot for the kingdom of God.

He was married to Muriel, they had been married 40 years.

And then she began to have some memory problems, that got very severe.

He tells about a time they were visiting a neurologist and the doctor asked her to name the four Gospels and she couldn’t do it.

The McQuilkins were part of a wonderful Christian community.

Lots of people said: We’ll care for Muriel so you can continue important work.

He considered that. Didn’t think it would be wrong to go that route

But he decided to resign so he could care for her himself.

He was once talking to an expert on home care,

and she told him it is fairly common for women to be caregivers of Alzheimer’s patients, but that men almost never do it.

She also told him that when men do give care, it’s only for one of two reasons—financial necessity or guilt.

Robertson asked her: What about love? She said: I put that under guilt.

He discovered that one of the cruel ironies about caring for an Alzheimer’s patient is the better you love the person, they longer they live.

For the last 13 years of her life, she did not know who he was.

He wrote a famous essay in the middle of those years called “Living By Vows.”

Then after her death a book called *A Promise Kept*.

Here’s what McQuilkin said about his decision to resign and care for wife full time.

When the time came, the decision was firm. It took no great calculation. It was a matter of integrity. Had I not promised, 42 years before, “in sickness and in health. . . till death do us part”? . . . I don’t have to care for her, I get to.

He remembered his wife. He remembered his covenant partner.

He did it because, like Noah, Dr. McQuilkin, serves a remembering God. The whole universe and our lives overseen by the loving, personal, remembering God of Noah—not by impersonal forces, not by karma

That brings us to the second point.

MP#2 How is it experienced?

God remembers me like he remembered Noah. Ok. But I can't see God.

So how do I know? My life outwardly is no different from unbelievers' lives. Christians suffer the same troubles and sorrows of life in a fallen world.

Muriel got Alzheimer's . Robertson lost his wife's companionship. How is the remembering, promise-keeping presence of God felt in that?

How do you experience it in the midst of your troubles?

Where are you God? Do you remember me?

Perhaps Noah asked those very questions after a year on the ark.

This chapter shows us three ways we experience it—wind, tokens, and words.

First, wind.

God remembered Noah and he sent a wind over the earth and the waters receded.

What does that remind you of earlier in Genesis?

Chapter one, the creation. The Spirit of God hovering over the waters.

It's the same Hebrew word, **XWR**, wind, spirit, breath—imagery throughout Bible.

In John 3, Jesus compares the work of the Holy Spirit to the wind:

The wind blows wherever it pleases. You hear its sound, but you cannot tell where it comes from or where it is going. So it is with everyone born of the Spirit.

In John 20, when the risen Lord Jesus appeared before disciples in the inner room he breathed on them and said, Receive the Holy Spirit.

On the day of Pentecost, there was a wind that signaled presence of the Holy Spirit.

You know God has remembered you by the wind of the Holy Spirit in your life.

His fresh, re-creative presence gives you a renewed sense of purpose, love, patience, confidence, contentment—whatever you need.

I was talking to a pastor friend recently who had gone through a time of turmoil about his church and a desire he had to leave. Felt like Noah in ark.

Then a fresh wind blew and he had a renewed sense of calling and contentment. This is not charismatic stuff. Not being slain in the Spirit, that sort of thing.

This is subtle. The Holy Spirit is the shy member of the Trinity.

But it's real. When God remembers you, he sends the wind.

That wind in felt in every positive movement of your soul.

Second, tokens.

Noah sent out the birds, the raven first and then the dove.

And the dove returned with a freshly plucked olive leaf.

So what? Birds pick up stuff all the time. There's nothing unusual about that. But Noah saw in that little detail of life a sign that God had remembered him. That's why the detail is recorded, because it was a token of God's remembrance. The Lord still works that way with us.

He uses little, ordinary details of life as tokens of his faithfulness.

You have to see them, appreciate them, and not brush them aside as coincidence. Two weeks ago there was a matter that I was concerned about.

There was someone I needed to call and talk to about this matter.

I hadn't spoken to this person in probably four years.

What do you know, phone rang, it was him. Calling about unrelated matter.

And I said: You aren't going to believe this, I was needing to talk to you.

He's a Christian and he laughed and said: The Lord arranged it.

Some believers are better and seeing and appreciating these tokens than others.

I've never been good at it. I don't have enough faith.

I tend to chalk things up to coincidence. I know better than that theologically. There are no pure coincidences. Everything governed by God's providence.

So look for those freshly plucked olive leaves and take heart that God remembers.

Third, words.

This is probably the most straightforward.

God spoke to Noah and told him it was time to leave the ark.

And God speaks to us today through written word. Through the Bible.

And it is through his word we experience his remembrance, know not forgotten. It's been my experience of the Christian life, and this is just me,

that God's word has come to me with exceptional power just a few times.

But it came at a time when I really needed it and it and there was such a palpable sense of the Lord's presence that I've never forgotten the words.

Once his word to me was 1 Timothy 6.

But godliness with contentment is great gain, for we brought nothing into this world and we can take nothing out, but if we have food and clothing we will be content with that.

Another key time his word to me was James 1.

If any man lacks wisdom he should ask God who gives generously to all without finding fault and it will be given to him. But when he asks, he must not doubt. That man will not receive anything from the Lord, he is a double-minded man, unstable in all his ways.

And then another time his word to me was Romans 5.

We rejoice in the hope of the glory of God. Not only so, but we also rejoice in sufferings because we know that suffering produces perseverance, perseverance character, and character hope, and hope does not disappoint us, because God has poured out his love into our hearts by the Holy Spirit whom he has given us.

When God remembers you, you can experience it by Spirit, tokens, word.

MP#3 How you should respond?

When God remembers you, how should you respond to him?

How did Noah respond? He built an altar and made sacrifices, burnt offerings.

What does that mean? How can we do that?

Well, there were three things going on in Noah's sacrifice, and I think you'll see how they apply to you.

First, he was expressing his gratitude.

Thank you, Lord, for delivering me and my family.

Thank you for bringing us to this place of life in the midst of all this destruction.

Noah didn't just feel gratitude in his heart,

he expressed it through the formal act of worship.

And that's how it always is in the Bible.

When I was a boy, my mother made me write thank you notes.

And after Christmas or my birthday, there were always a number of people to thank, and I remember how tedious that stack of thank you notes seemed.

But that's a window into thankfulness as the Bible describes it.

Yes, your heart must be grateful, but that gratitude must be expressed in words and actions of worship.

Not to put to fine a point on it, but you need to go to church on Sunday for the express purpose of thanking him.

I had a friend once who had a huge answer to prayer, it involved a matter that had dragged on for months, he had asked all his Christian friends to pray.

The Lord remembered him, prayers answered, matter resolved in his favor.

And the very next Sunday, instead of going to church and giving thanks with his Christian friends who had prayed, he went to the beach.

You understand what I'm saying—It's not wrong to go to the beach—

But the biblical pattern of thanksgiving is not just being grateful in your heart.

It's the sacrifice of formal worship. Giving thanks in great assembly.

Second, Noah's sacrifice, like all sacrifices in the Bible, pointed to Jesus Christ.

A sacrifice said, I need God's grace and mercy.

Yes, I survived the flood, but I'm no better by nature than those God destroyed.

The death of the sacrificial animals was a substitutionary death.

This is the death I should have died, but someone has died for me.

So even though the coming of the Messiah was still centuries away and shrouded in mystery, true Old Testament religion from very beginning was counting on him.

And here's the point for each of us.

When God remembers you, when you experience his faithfulness—

don't for one minute think it's because you've done good and God owes you.

Instead, know and affirm that this favor and remembrance of God is only

because of your union with Jesus Christ.

Sometimes you hear Christians say: God loves you just as you are.

And it's not wrong to say that. I understand their point.

But if we were going to be more precise we would say:

God loves you just as you are in Christ.

Make the most of every opportunity to focus on him.

Then, third, Noah's sacrifice was an affirmation of his total commitment to God.

Notice what these sacrifices are called—burnt offerings.

Here we have the beginnings of what would become the sacrificial system

of the people of God, spelled out in great detail in Leviticus.

Although in one sense all sacrifices were the same—

all pointed to Christ and the need for a substitute.

In another sense, they were different.

Different types of sacrifices that signified different aspects of worship and motions of the soul toward God.

And the burnt offering was one particular sort of offering. Very first mention.

It's distinguishing characteristic was that the entire animal cut up and burned.

Burnt offering signified the total commitment of the worshipper to God.

Lord, here I am, take me, challenge me, change me—

I'm yours, and I want to serve you.

I know I'm weak, I know my resolve and good intentions fluctuate greatly.

But at this moment, this is what I want, to be yours completely.

Friends, we get to do all this right now.

We're coming to the Lord's Table. This is Noah's altar.

The outward signs have changed and deepened, but the meaning is the same.
Now is the time for you to tangibly give thanks to the Lord for remembering you.
And to commune with your substitute and Savior Jesus Christ,
And to renew your covenant with him, offer yourself up wholly to God again—
and especially devote to him those areas of your life where you have strayed.

Our God is a remembering God. He remembered Noah. He remembers you.