

Genesis 8:20-22

Noah's Offering and God's Promise

Genesis 8 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 The Lord smelled the soothing aroma; and the LORD said to Himself, "I will never again curse the ground on account of man, for the intent of man's heart is evil from his youth; and I will never again destroy every living thing, as I have done.

²² "While the earth remains,
Seedtime and harvest,
And cold and heat,
And summer and winter,
And day and night
Shall not cease."

Introduction

An Overview...Matthew Henry on Genesis 8:1-22

...In the close of the foregoing chapter we left the world in ruins...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 (v. 1, 2).
2. They begin sensibly to abate (v. 3).
3. After sixteen days' ebbing, the ark rests (v. 4).
4. After sixty days' ebbing, the tops of the mountains appeared above water (v. 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 (v. 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 (v. 13), though not dried so as to be fit for man till almost two months after (v. 14).

Continued...

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

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

In detail...Matthew Henry on Genesis 8:20-22...

I.Noah's thankful acknowledgment of God's favour to him, in completing the mercy of his deliverance, v. 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 (wait) 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.***

Noah's Burnt offerings...

Note on 8.1...Then Noah built an altar to the LORD. Noah looked to the Lord very firmly in these momentous days at the beginning of the new world. **burnt offerings. *Sacrifices to atone for sin and please the Lord*** (sweet savour, cf. Lev. 1:4,9,13,17). ***This was costly worship given the limited number of clean animals*** (7:2).

Matthew Barrett, RHB Study Bible

Keil and Delitzsch on Genesis 8:20...

The first thing which Noah did, was to build an altar for burnt sacrifice, to thank the Lord for gracious protection, and pray for His mercy in time to come. This altar, a place for the offering of slain animals is the first altar mentioned in history. The sons of Adam had built no altar for their offerings, because God was still present on the earth in

paradise, so that they could turn their offerings and hearts towards that abode.

But with the flood God had swept paradise away, withdrawn the place of His presence, and set up His throne in heaven, from which He would henceforth reveal Himself to man (cf. Genesis 9:5, Genesis 9:7). ...

Leupold on the Burnt Offering in Genesis 8:20...

“Some regard the purpose of this sacrifice to be only propitiation. In view of the whole preceding situation and the natural feeling of gratitude that must have possessed the heart of any one, or any group, that find they alone have been spared in a universal catastrophe, we find the ruling out of the idea of thanksgiving in connection with this sacrifice to be preposterous. The purposes of thanksgiving and of propitiation blend in this sacrifice.

This altar is raised to Yahweh, because Noah is mindful of the gracious fidelity which God in the person of Yahweh so mercifully displayed.

If the definition of what was clean or unclean corresponded roughly to what the Mosaic law defined later, as we have every reason to believe, cf. Lev.11 and Deut.14, ***this must have been a generous sacrifice and in proportion to the number of creatures extant the most liberal sacrifice ever offered. But, of a certainty, never was there a man who had greater occasion to render hearty thanks to God.***”

H C Leupold, Genesis

Matthew Henry continued...

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, ch. 7:2,*

Regarding the ‘Sevens’...

Genesis 8 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.

Genesis 7 ² You shall take with you of every clean animal by **sevens**, a male and his female; and of the animals that are not clean two, a male and his female; ³ also of the birds of the sky, **by sevens**, male and female, to keep offspring alive on the face of all the earth.

Note on 7.2...“by sevens” Most take this to mean seven pairs (the male and the female) of clean animals

Michael Barrett

But... I’m inclined to understand this as 3 pairs plus 1 additional (i.e. 7 animals). The 6 clean animals plus 1 additional clean animal would be consistent with...

- 1. The customary practice of one animal sacrificed (see Appendix-Leviticus 1)***
- 2. Three pairs (male and female) remaining would be consistent with replenishing the earth as reproductive pairs.***
- 3. The extra 7th clean animal would be anticipatory of a sacrifice to be made at the exodus from the ark***

Why?

Leupold on Genesis 7.2,3...

Genesis 7² You shall take with you of every clean animal **by sevens**, a male and his female; and of the animals that are not clean two, a male and his female

In 6:19 a general direction had been given to Noah to the effect that two of every kind of beasts were to be taken into the ark. There was then no occasion for giving all details. Now that the entrance into the ark is imminent, these last details are added...***The Hebrew expression "take seven seven" means "seven each"...Hebrew parallels support this explanation. In any case, it would be a most clumsy method of trying to say "fourteen." Three pairs and one supernumerary (i.e. extra) make the "seven." As has often been suggested, the supernumerary beast was the one Noah could conveniently offer for sacrifice after the termination of the Flood.*** In v.3 the idea of "the birds of the heavens" must, of course, be supplemented by the adjective "clean," according to the principle laid down in v.2. The birds are separately mentioned so that Noah might not be left to-his own devices in fixing the limits of what v.2 included...***The object of gathering all these clean beasts together in the ark is said to be "to preserve seed alive."*** The expression "seed" is here used quite appropriately, because these creatures naturally come under the point of view of such from which all others are again to spring. At the same time the thought is expressed that these apparently few creatures will under divine

providence be adequate again to cover "the face of all the earth." There is a promise latent in this expression of purpose.

Keil and Delitzsch on Genesis 8:20...

Noah took his offerings from every clean beast and every clean fowl - from those animals, therefore, which were destined for man's food; ***probably the seventh of every kind, which he had taken into the ark.***

Matthew Henry continued...

3. Here observe,

(1.) **Noah 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.) **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 accepted. For,

1. **God was well pleased with the performance, v. 21. He smelled 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 (ch. 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, Deu. 32:36.

Two ways this resolve is expressed:-

[1.] **I will not again curse the ground.** God had cursed the ground upon the first entrance of sin (ch. 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, ch. 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 shaped and conceived in it.

Genesis 8:21 and the doctrine of original sin...

Leupold on Genesis 8:21...

The reason advanced for sparing the earth is much like that given in 6:5 for destroying the earth. The difference, that this verse says "from his youth," is little different from that of 6:5

"only evil continually."... The seeming contradiction...solves itself by the simple fact that one and the same truth may, according to varying circumstances, be regarded from different viewpoints.

Of course, ***here again in its earliest pages the Bible gives indubitable proof of the natural depravity of the human heart.***

Keil and Delitzsch on Genesis 8:21...

It was not because the thoughts and desires of the human heart are evil that God would not smite any more every living thing, that is to say, would not exterminate it judicially; but because they are evil from his youth up, because evil is innate in man, and for that reason he needs the forbearance of God; and also (and here lies the principal motive for the divine resolution) because in the offering of the righteous Noah, not only were thanks presented for past protection, and entreaty for further care, but the desire of man was expressed, to remain in fellowship with God, and to procure the divine favour.

God's mercy as the primary antidote for sin...

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 (v. 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.

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.

Great is Thy Faithfulness

Thomas Chisholm, 1923

1 Great is Thy faithfulness, O God my Father;
there is no shadow of turning with Thee;
Thou changest not, Thy compassions, they fail not;
as Thou hast been, Thou forever wilt be.

Refrain:

Great is Thy faithfulness!
Great is Thy faithfulness!
Morning by morning new mercies I see;
all I have needed Thy hand hath provided:
great is Thy faithfulness, Lord, unto me!

**2 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.**

3 Pardon for sin and a peace that endureth,
Thine own dear presence to cheer and to guide;
strength for today and bright hope for tomorrow:
blessings all mine, with ten thousand beside!

Noah's sacrifice resulted in God's promise not to send another flood, so Christ's sacrifice resulted in God's promise not to punish His people in wrath (Isa. 53:10–11; 54:9–10).

Michael Barrett

“While the Earth Remains”...Environment and Evangelism/Weather and Witness

“The priority of the gospel is made all the more urgent when we realize that God's promise of common grace carries with it the news that there is a definite end in store for the world. “While the earth remains,” God said, before promising to maintain the order of nature (Gen. 8:22).

God's promise never again to flood the earth ensured that there would be a long history in which the gospel promise of Jesus would spread to all the world (Matt. 24:14). But God has ordained another and final day of judgment, when the earth will be cleansed not by water but by fire (2 Peter 3:5–7). Christ will return and sit on his throne of judgment.”

Richard Phillips, Genesis

Thoughts for Personal/Family Worship

The burnt offering, along with all the other types of sacrifice, was a clear yet imperfect picture of the once-for-all sacrifice of Jesus Christ, the Lamb slain from the foundation of the world (Rev. 13:8). Animal sacrifices could never and were never intended to take away sin (Heb. 10:1–4). Only the sacrifice of Christ could do that (Heb. 10:12). But they were graphic sermons of the necessity of a perfect substitute, of death as sin's penalty, of blood shedding as the means of forgiveness, of reconciliation and consecration.

The appropriate response to deliverance from trouble is worship. Noah might well have said to himself that he could not afford the time or resources to worship God after leaving the ark, but instead he built an altar and offered up sacrifices. From what evils, either physical or spiritual, has God delivered you? How are you worshipping Him for it?

Joel Beeke, Family Worship Bible Guide

Romans 12 Therefore I urge you, brethren, by the mercies of God, to present your bodies a living and holy sacrifice, acceptable to God, *which is* your spiritual service of worship. ²And do not be conformed to this world, but be transformed by the renewing of your mind, so that you may prove what the will of God is, that which is good and acceptable and perfect.

My Tribute

Andrae Crouch

How can I say thanks
For the things You have done for me?
Things so undeserved
Yet You gave to prove Your love for me
The voices of a million angels
Could not express my gratitude
All that I am and ever hope to be
I owe it all to Thee

To God be the glory
To God be the glory
To God be the glory
For the things He has done

With His blood He has saved me
With His power He has raised me
To God be the glory
For the things He has done

Just let me live my life
Let it pleasing, Lord to Thee
And if I gain any praise
Let it go to Calvary
With His blood He has saved me
With His power He has raised me
To God (to God) be the glory
For the things He has done

Appendix...Leviticus 1...The Burnt Offering

1 Then the Lord called to Moses and spoke to him from the tent of meeting, saying,
2 “Speak to the sons of Israel and say to them, ‘When any man of you brings an offering to the Lord, you shall bring your offering of animals from the herd or the flock. 3 ***If his offering is a burnt offering from the herd, he shall offer it, a male without defect***; he shall offer it at the doorway of the tent of meeting, that he may be accepted before the Lord. 4 ***He shall lay his hand on the head of the burnt offering, that it may be accepted for him to make atonement on his behalf***. 5 He shall slay the young bull before the Lord; and Aaron’s sons the priests shall offer up the blood and sprinkle the blood around on the altar that is at the doorway of the tent of meeting. 6 He shall then skin the burnt offering and cut it into its pieces. 7 The sons of Aaron the priest shall put fire on the altar and arrange wood on the fire. 8 Then Aaron’s sons the priests shall arrange the pieces, the head and the suet over the wood which is on the fire that is on the altar. 9 Its entrails, however, and its legs he shall wash with water. And the priest shall offer up in smoke all of it on the altar for a burnt offering, an offering by fire of ***a soothing aroma to the Lord***.

10 ‘But if his offering is from the flock, of the sheep or of the goats, for a burnt offering, he shall offer it a male without defect. 11 He shall slay it on the side of the altar northward before the Lord, and Aaron’s sons the priests shall sprinkle its blood around on the altar. 12 He shall then cut it into its pieces with its head and its suet, and the priest shall arrange them on the wood which is on the fire that is on the altar. 13 The entrails, however, and the legs he shall wash with water. And the priest shall offer all of it, and offer it up in smoke on the altar; it is a burnt offering, an offering by fire of ***a soothing aroma to the Lord***.

14 ‘But if his offering to the Lord is a burnt offering of birds, then he shall bring his offering from the turtledoves or from young pigeons. 15 The priest shall bring it to the altar, and wring off its head and offer it up in smoke on the altar; and its blood is to be drained out on the side of the altar. 16 He shall also take away its crop with its feathers and cast it beside the altar eastward, to the place of the ashes. 17 Then he shall tear it by its wings, *but* shall not sever *it*. And the priest shall offer it up in smoke on the altar on the wood which is on the fire; it is a burnt offering, an offering by fire of ***a soothing aroma to the Lord***.

Appendix...Biography of Matthew Henry

<https://banneroftruth.org/us/about/banner-authors/matthew-henry/>

Matthew Henry was born at Broad Oak, Flintshire, in October 1662, into the godly home of Philip and Katharine Henry, less than two months after his father was ejected under the Act of Uniformity from ministry in the Church of England. He had one brother, John who died at the age of six, and four sisters, Sarah (the oldest), Katharine, Eleanor, and Ann (the youngest). When three years old it is said that he could read the Bible distinctly, and he early showed a strong passion for books. He was educated primarily by his father, with the assistance of tutors.

In 1680 his father took him, aged 18, to the academy of Thomas Doolittle at Hackney, where he studied for two years under Doolittle and Thomas Vincent, until persecution forced the academy to relocate. Henry moved to the estate of Bronington, Flintshire, which he inherited from his maternal grandfather, Daniel Matthews. The next time he returned to London it was to study law, and he was admitted to Gray's Inn in 1685.

He continued his theological study in private, and began to preach in his father's neighbourhood in 1686. He moved to Chester the following year, and was asked to become the local minister. The penalties against dissent having been somewhat relaxed, he was privately ordained a minister in London in 1687. Returning to Chester, he began his twenty-five-year ministry of the Presbyterian congregation there. That same year, he married Katherine Hardware of Bromborough, Cheshire; she died in childbirth (James Hamilton in his *Life of Matthew Henry*, 1847, says it was smallpox) in February 1689, at the age of 25.

The following year, Henry married Mary Warburton, with whom he had one son, Philip, and eight daughters, three of whom died in infancy. Henry saw much success in his Chester ministry – the number of communicants was eventually 350, and a meetinghouse was built for him in Crook Lane, opened in 1700, with a gallery added in 1706. As well as his congregational work, Henry held monthly services in surrounding villages and preached to prisoners in the castle.

He began work on his famous *Commentary on the Whole Bible* in 1704, completing it from Genesis to Acts by his death ten years later. Several of his fellow ministers compiled the remainder of the *Commentary* (Romans to Revelation) primarily from Henry's own notes and writings. While still at Chester, Henry also completed his *A Method for Prayer with Scripture Expressions proper to be used under each head* (an edition of which, edited by O Palmer Robertson, is published by the Trust as *A Way to Pray*).

As his *Commentary* began to be published, Henry became increasingly well-known, and was eventually prevailed upon to move to Mare Street, Hackney in London in 1712. This gave him opportunities of preaching almost every day of the week, and sometimes two or three time on the same day. It was probably in this way that he accomplished most, for his Hackney congregation was not large. He found only a hundred communicants. It was not a lively period in the history of religion anywhere, and the London churches widely shared the spiritual torpor which soon after his decease transformed the Presbyterian chapel at Chester into a Unitarian meeting-house.

Revisiting Cheshire in 1714, on Monday, June 21, Henry set out on his return to London. He was engaged to preach at Nantwich on the way. At Tarporley, his horse threw him, but he denied that he had sustained any injury. Accordingly, he preached on Proverbs 31:18; but everyone noticed that he was not so lively as usual. He was short, and afterwards very heavy and sleepy; he was soon seized with apoplexy, and at eight on the following morning he fell asleep in the Lord. He was buried in the chancel of Trinity Church, Chester.