

PARASHAH SIX

Genesis 8:1–14; Habakkuk 3:1–5; Revelation 1:9–20

notes by Tim Hegg

God Remembered

In the on-going narrative of Genesis, we are privileged to see the work and character of God unfolded in the course of human history. But Moses' purpose in these opening chapters of the Torah is not simply to recount what happened in ancient times. He writes, under the guidance of the Ruach, to tell us the story of redemption—the manner in which mankind's rebellion against his Creator would be overcome by divine sovereignty, in order to bring about unending communion between God and His creation.

We have already seen that God intends to bring about His purposes through the vehicle of a covenant. He binds Himself to promises made with all living things and begins the process of accomplishing these promises. Ultimately, the covenant made through Noah has as its primary purpose the fulfillment of the promise made to Eve, that one would come from her offspring who would personally inflict a wound upon the deceiver. Though mankind is wiped away by the flood, the preservation of Noah and his family secures the viability of Eve's offspring: the promise is still intact.

Our *parashah* opens with the words “But God remembered Noah...” (וַיִּזְכֹּר אֱלֹהִים אֶת נֹחַ). The NASB (along with the NIV, ESV, NRSV, etc.) translates “But God remembered Noah” This is because the opening word of our section is a so-called *vav consecutive*, indicating in this case an on-going or resultant action connected to the previous context. In the previous chapter, the narrative ends with the bleak notice that all of mankind was wiped from the face of the earth, and that Noah and his family were preserved in the ark. It is against this stark picture of destruction that our *parashah* begins. Thus the *vav* is translated correctly as disjunctive—showing a contrast. In the face of this utter destruction, Noah and his family are preserved because “God remembered.”

The manner in which they are saved from the destruction is cast in covenant terms: “God remembered Noah, and all the beasts and all the cattle that were with him in the ark.” Of course, when the text says God remembered Noah, it also includes the family of Noah. So those who were in the ark are “remembered” by God. Too often the word “remember” is taken in its English sense. Some might read it as though God, in the face of the long time span (150 days), had forgotten about Noah. With the wide-spread destruction caused by the flood, and the wiping out of mankind along with a majority of the animals, God's attention had been diverted from Noah and the ark. After the rain ceases, God suddenly remembers what He had forgotten. Of course, this cannot be the meaning of the term! And if we look for the use of “remember” in the biblical narrative, we discover that at times it does not function as our English word does. Rather, the word “remember” (זָכַר, *zachar*) is often used in covenant language of the Ancient Near East to identify loyalty to a covenant promise. “To remember” the covenant is to be loyal to it; to “forget” the covenant is to break it.

Note the following examples of the covenant use of “remember”:

So God heard their groaning; and God remembered His covenant with Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob. (Ex 2:24)

Furthermore I have heard the groaning of the sons of Israel, because the Egyptians are

holding them in bondage, and I have remembered My covenant. (Ex 6:5)

then I will remember My covenant with Jacob, and I will remember also My covenant with Isaac, and My covenant with Abraham as well, and I will remember the land. (Lev 26:42)

Do not despise us, for Your own name's sake; Do not disgrace the throne of Your glory; Remember and do not annul Your covenant with us. (Jer 14:21)

Nevertheless, I will remember My covenant with you in the days of your youth, and I will establish an everlasting covenant with you. (Ezek 16:60)

Thus says Adonai, "For three transgressions of Tyre and for four I will not revoke its punishment, Because they delivered up an entire population to Edom, And did not remember the covenant of brotherhood. (Amos 1:9)

In each of these cases, the use of "remember" clearly means "act in loyalty to the covenant." The same is true in our *parashah*. When God is said to "remember Noah," it means that He is acting in loyalty to the covenant made with Noah. The promise of this covenant is given in Gen 6:18, and thus God faithfully enacts the covenant by preserving Noah, his family, and the animals in the ark. The covenant continues to be enacted as God prepares to bring Noah, his family, and animals out of the ark. This demonstrates the divine initiative in the whole process of Noah's salvation through the flood: God's covenant promises stand as the foundation for His gracious actions toward His covenant partners.

With this understanding of the word "remember" well established, we should not miss the words of our Master as He celebrated the final Pesach of His first advent: "do this as a way of remembering Me" (Lk 22:19). When we celebrate the Pesach, it is not merely a ceremony which brings to our minds events which otherwise we might forget (though the seder does function to keep these vital, historical events well in our perspective). When we celebrate Pesach, we are doing so in loyalty to the covenant of which Yeshua Himself is the mediator. We celebrate "in remembrance" of Yeshua, that is, as demonstrating our loyalty to the New Covenant which He makes actual. And what is this New Covenant (Jer 31:31-34)? It is the actual establishment of the Torah in the life and community of the faithful, the Torah no longer left written on stone or parchment alone, but also written upon the heart by the work of the Ruach. Moreover, a covenant meal entered into as a "remembering of Yeshua" (=a confession to be loyal to the covenant of which He is the mediator) is likewise a commitment to one's fellow covenant members. When Jeremiah first gives notice of the "New Covenant," it is clear that this covenant is enacted with "the house of Israel" and the "house of Judah," ultimately combined in the one designation "Israel." How differently would the whole "Lord's Table" be viewed by the Christian Church if they realized that the words engraved on the "communion table" at the front of many auditoriums, "In Remembrance of Me," was actually a statement of loyalty to a covenant enacted with Israel!

Thus, God's remembering of Noah, his family, and the animals is a statement of His covenant faithfulness, not an indication that He had forgotten them! And the manner in which the opening sentence is cast shows that the stopping of the fountains and the rain, along with the drying up of the water via a divinely ordained wind (רוּחַ, *ruach*), were all a result of God's acting upon the previously promised covenant.

The chronological notices given us in the flood narrative are curious. The waters began upon the earth in the 600th year of Noah's life, in the second month, on the 17th day of the month (7:11). The ground is

completely dry in the 601st year of Noah's life, in the second month, on the 27th day of the month. Thus, the whole ordeal lasted one year and ten days. Some have suggested that the figure of 150 days corresponds to five months reckoned in a solar year (360 days) since this would be five months of 30 days. Yet while this may be true, there is no clear data to confirm the number of days between the 17th of the second month and the 27th of the second month a year later. Furthermore, the detailing of the months themselves is not certain, though before the exodus event, when the month of the exodus becomes the first month in the Hebrew festival calendar, it would appear that another month was reckoned as the first (else why would there be any need for God to command the exodus month to be first?). If the current Tishri was the first month (as seems most probable), then the flood began and the ground became completely dry in Cheshvan. This would mean that the ark rested upon Ararat on the 17th day of Nisan, which would eventually become the middle of the Feast of Unleavened Bread (which begins on the 15th of Nisan). Likewise, the mountains became visible on the first day of the tenth month, or Tammuz. Most interesting is the notice that the water on the ground disappeared on the first month (though the word "month" is not actually written), on the first day of the month. This would be Yom Teruah/Rosh HaShannah, corresponding to the beginning of creation. As at the beginning of creating, when God overcame the chaos of "without form and void" by forming and filling, so here He would begin the process of bringing the world back into its proper order. Some have suggested that a 364 day year (like that found in Jubilees) is used to calculate the chronology of the flood (see Wenham, *Genesis in WBC*, 1.180).

It may be that we are not to derive any clear significance to the particular chronological reports as much as we are simply to understand that God is working out His plan according to a schedule controlled exclusively by Him. In the pagan accounts of the flood, the gods do not control the flood and the destiny of mankind, but are themselves controlled by external factors. In contrast, the flood as detailed by Moses in the Torah is in every way controlled by God Who is Himself uncontrolled. The future of mankind was clearly in the hands of the Almighty, and He accomplished both His wrath and His salvation through the same element: the flood. On the one hand, the flood enacted the divine wrath upon rebellious mankind. On the other, the flood was the means of carrying the ark and its chosen cargo to a place of safety and salvation. In like manner, death, which is the penalty for sin, becomes the means of our salvation in the death of the Messiah. "Through death He conquered death" (Heb. 2:14–15).