

# Noah - Part 5

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Date: 16 March 2014

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[ 0 : 0 0 ] I think all of us at some stage in our lives have been attracted by the prospect of a fresh start. It might be a new job or even a career change, a new house, a move to a new location.

Any of these things, and perhaps others also, can provide the often welcome opportunity for a fresh start. Now, the extent to which a fresh start is attractive can be, may be, directly proportional to the mess we might have made of things thus far. The words of a pop song from the 1980s come to mind, rip it up and start again. I really should try and get into this century in the matter of musical references, but I don't think that's going to happen, so you just have to bear with my 1980s references, although I did have one more contemporary one a couple of weeks ago that some of you might have spotted, but I won't take it any further than that. But the idea of a fresh start, I think we all can relate to, and we can perhaps think of times when we thought, well, that's really what I need, a fresh start. Maybe that's what you're thinking now, a fresh start would be good for whatever reason. Now, in the passage that we have read, we are witnesses to the first day, indeed the first moments, of a fresh start of global proportions. Noah emerges from the ark, if not to a new creation, certainly to a renewed creation, and a fresh start for a humanity that had messed up big time the first time around. Now, how do you inaugurate a new creation or a renewed creation? I wonder what Danny Boyle would propose if given such a commission. You'll remember Danny

Boyle was the guy who organized the Olympics inaugural ceremony. What ceremony would be fitting for inaugurating a renewed creation, maybe a celebration of the achievements of mankind? Well, I think that would be singularly inappropriate, given what had just gone before. I don't know if fireworks would figure in a program put together by Danny Boyle. They seem to be a must in any self-respecting opening ceremony. What about the inauguration, then, of planet Earth following the flood of renewed planet Earth? What opening ceremony took place? What happened on day one when the calendar was reset to zero? Well, what we find and what we've read at the end of chapter 8 is that at the very heart of what we might call the opening ceremony, we find a sacrifice. A sacrifice is offered. I don't know how that sounds to you as the central element in this opening ceremony of a renewed creation. Does it sound just a little primitive that this would lie at the heart of this opening event of this renewed creation?

But what we discover is that God is very much involved in the matter of the sacrifice described. And we can order what we're going to say this evening in a manner that connects God with the sacrifice that we have read on there at the end of chapter 8. And the way we'll do so is by considering what we have before us under these three headings. First of all, God provides a sacrifice.

God provides a sacrifice. The second thing we'll discover in our text is that God is pleased with the sacrifice. But then thirdly, we'll discover that God promises on the grounds of sacrifice, on the grounds of the sacrifice offered. So, God provides a sacrifice, He's pleased with the sacrifice, and He makes promises on the grounds of sacrifice. So, let's think of each of these in turn. First of all, God provides a sacrifice. And there are two aspects here that I want you to notice. First of all, properly speaking, God provides, but also God purposes. So, God provides and God purposes, but both under the general heading of God providing. God provides. What do we read in our text concerning this sacrifice? Well, we read there in verse 20 that Noah built an altar to the Lord, and taking some of all the clean animals and clean birds, he sacrificed burnt offerings on it. But who had determined and who had provided for the availability of these animals that were employed for the purpose of offering this sacrifice? Well, we find the answer. I think we know the answer, but we find the answer explicitly in chapter 7 and in verse 2, when God is giving instructions to Noah concerning the ark. We read there in the second verse of chapter 7, take with you seven of every kind of clean animal, a male and its mate, and two of every kind of unclean animal, a male and its mate, and so on.

[ 5 : 34 ] So, here in the instruction God gives, he is already anticipating the need for these clean animals for the purpose of the sacrifice that is now being offered. So, the sacrifice is being offered to God, but it is God himself who provides the sacrifice to be offered. Of course, God does more than simply provide the animals, important though that is. He gives the instructions concerning the manner in which the sacrifice is to be made. Now, I'm stating that, and if you have been following the reading of these chapters in these past weeks, you might say, well, hang on a minute, where does he do that? Where does God give instructions concerning this sacrifice? And the reality is that in the prior chapters we don't find recorded for us explicit instructions concerning this sacrifice that Noah offers. But though we don't find explicit instructions, I think it is entirely reasonable to infer that these instructions were indeed given. For example, if we just think of one aspect of the sacrifice, that it was clean animals that were employed. Now, where did that come from? Was that the product of Noah's fertile imagination, that he saw all these animals and he said, well, let's see, let's divide these between unclean and clean, and then say, oh, well, for a sacrifice, well, let's use the clean ones.

Well, no, clearly these were matters that God had given instructions on to Noah. And if that is true in the matter of the matter of the animals offered, I think it's entirely reasonable to conclude that it is also true concerning all the aspects of the sacrifice that Noah offers. God provides the animals, but he also provides the instructions that Noah follows in offering the sacrifice we have recorded here. God provides, and just keep that very much in mind, that the sacrifice to be offered to God is a sacrifice provided by God. So, God provides, but also under that general heading of God provides, we can say that God purposes. Now, in exploring the purposes of God, we're really asking the question, why? Or the question, what was the purpose of the sacrifice? We read of the sacrifice that Noah offers, but what purpose did it serve? What was the reason for it? That's really the question we're exploring here, and I'd like to suggest that it served two purposes. The overarching purpose was of worship. This was an act of worship on the part of Noah and his family, worship rendered to God. But within that overarching reality, we can identify two purposes. We might say two elements of the worship that Noah offers, and that is thanksgiving, and I think that's very obvious, very evident in the circumstances. But I think there's another element, and we're going to dwell a little bit more on the second because it's less immediately obvious. The second element is atonement, thanksgiving and atonement. As I say, the first purpose of the sacrifice, to render to God thanks for what He had done, for delivering Noah and his family from the flood, that seems to me an obvious one. Noah would, of course, of course, have been grateful to God that in the midst of this cataclysm, he and his loved ones were spared, and so he builds this altar, and he offers this sacrifice, a sacrifice of thanksgiving to God for His protection, for His deliverance from the flood.

But what about the second element that I'm suggesting is present in the sacrifice, this aspect of atonement? Are we reading into the account what we want to find or feel we ought to be present?

I think it will help in exploring this to ask another question. What was the sacrifice? What was it like? What characteristics are we told concerning this sacrifice? And we're told three further facts concerning the sacrifice in the passage, in addition to the one we've already noted, the use of clean animals. And what are these three further facts about the sacrifice that will help us to appreciate that it also included this aspect of atonement, and not only of thanksgiving?

Well, first of all, we're told that it was a burnt offering. That's what we read very clearly in verse 20, that Noah sacrificed burnt offerings on the altar that he had built. It was a burnt offering. It's the first thing to notice. The other thing that we can draw from the text is that it was a whole burnt offering. That maybe doesn't add a great deal to the reality of it being a burnt offering, but the language that is employed here for the very first time in the Bible, he sacrificed burnt offerings on it, is when subsequently found and used in the Old Testament, always a reference to a whole burnt offering. So, it's a burnt offering. It's a whole burnt offering. The whole of the animal is consumed on the altar. But then the third clue, if you wish, the third fact that's pertinent to what we're trying to explore here is that this sacrifice was a pleasing aroma to God. And we're going to come back to that in a moment, but it's important to just note it at this point, in establishing the purpose of the sacrifice. So, it's a burnt offering. It's a whole burnt offering. It's a pleasing aroma to God.

[ 11 : 22 ] Now, these three elements, together with what we'd already noticed about the use of clean animals, together point to a particular sacrifice later, subsequently, formally instituted in the Mosaic legislation, namely the burnt offering described in Leviticus chapter 1. Now, we don't have time this evening to go to Leviticus and read through the whole chapter. Curiously, we had occasion to do that not that long ago. But let us just notice, for our purposes, what is said in Leviticus chapter 1 concerning this burnt offering and its primary purpose. So, Leviticus chapter 1, and we just need to read verses 3 and 4. Leviticus chapter 1, verses 3 and 4. The heading of this chapter is the burnt offering. If we were to read through the chapter, we would find all these elements that we've already identified in Noah's offering. But notice what it says in verses 3 and 4. If the offering is a burnt offering from the herd, he is to offer a male without defect. He must present it at the entrance to the tent of meeting so that it will be acceptable to the Lord. He is to lay his hand on the head of the burnt offering, and it will be accepted on his behalf, and then notice what it says, to make atonement for him.

So, the worshiper, in presenting this burnt offering, is doing so with this intention, with this purpose, that atonement would be made for his sins. That was the effect, and that was the intention of this burnt offering. There in Leviticus, formally instituted in God's purposes, but anticipated, we might say, in Noah offering the sacrifice as he makes his way down from the ark into this renewed creation. So, the altar that is spoken of here is not only an altar of thanksgiving, which would be the obvious and evident meaning and purpose of this altar, to give thanks to God, but it is also an altar for atonement. And I want you to just pause and consider for a moment the implications of this.

It may seem all very distant, this talk of, you know, burnt sacrifices and whole burnt offerings, and you know, what's that good to do with us today? But let's just think of the implications of the fact that Noah offered such a sacrifice at this point in redemptive history. We've just had the flood, and in the flood, if I can speak rather loosely and crudely, all the bad people have been wiped out.

That was the purpose of the flood. It was an act of God's judgment to destroy the evil and wickedness in the world. So, all the bad people have been wiped out. We're just left with the good guys, Noah and his family, Noah, who was righteous and blameless.

And they've only just got off the ark, and they've got off the ark in obedience to God's command. God commands, says get out of the ark. They come out of the ark. They've just stepped onto the renewed soil of the earth, and yet already atonement is needed. You see, this is hugely significant.

[ 14 : 40 ] It's not that we have to wait until Noah does something bad, and then, oh, we've got to sort this out. You know, how do we sort this out? No, at the very beginning, in this opening ceremony of this renewed creation, central to it, we have the need for atonement. And of course, in this, we have a striking contrast with the original creation, where there was no altar, where no sacrifices were required.

The flood has not brought things back to where they were in Eden. Sin and God's gracious response to our sin requires that such a prominent place be given on day one to a sacrifice intended to secure atonement for sin.

So, God provides a sacrifice as a means whereby His people can worship Him, worship that involves thanksgiving, but that also involves confession and atonement for sin. God provides a sacrifice.

But what we can secondly say is that God is pleased with the sacrifice. Now, we've mentioned this already just in the passing in identifying the sacrifice as one that had as its purpose, or one of its purpose, it says, atonement. But let's think just a little more about this reality that's described for us in our passage, that God is pleased with the sacrifice. In verse 21, we read, the Lord smelled the pleasing aroma and said in His heart, and we'll go on to what He said in a moment, God is pleased with the sacrifice. The language of a pleasing aroma is language that attributes to God human physical attributes in order to get across a deeper reality. And of course, the meaning, I think, is clear enough. God is pleased with the sacrifice offered by Noah, the sacrifice that He Himself had provided and that He Himself had determined concerning how it should be offered. But He's pleased. And the question I want to ask, and just briefly answer, is why is God pleased? Why is God pleased? We're told He's pleased, but why is He pleased? Let me suggest a threefold answer to why God is pleased with the sacrifice offered. I think we can say, and reasonably and legitimately say, that God is pleased with Noah's obedience. God is pleased with Noah's obedience. He's pleased with His obedience in building the ark and doing all that He had been asked to do concerning the ark. He's pleased with Noah's obedience in offering the sacrifice that He had given instructions concerning. And God is pleased with that. He is pleased with Noah.

He is pleased with Noah's obedience. Obedience that is the fruit of Noah's faith. So He's pleased with Noah's obedience. That is certainly true. But I think we can also say that God is pleased with the effects of the sacrifice offered. He's pleased with the efficacy of the sacrifice offered. The sacrifice designed by God to atone for His people's sin will have the effect designed for Him. And this pleases God.

[ 17 : 57 ] And why does it please God? Because God is a God who delights in mercy. God is a God who enjoys forgiving. And so when the sacrifice is offered that has as its purpose and its intent to atone for His people's sin, well, that is pleasing to God because it achieves the effect intended. God is pleased with that. But related to that, and this is something we simply can't, we would never want to divorce from it.

There's a third element. And then we can say this, that God the Father is pleased with the one the sacrifice points forward to. God knows that the sacrifice offered by Noah has no efficacy in and of itself. As we were thinking about in the morning, the blood of bulls and goats cannot forgive sin.

But that sacrifice, as it relies on and points forward to the sacrifice of God's own Son, Jesus, in the place of sinners, is effective. And so the pleasing aroma that we read of here in the midst of time, in the days of Noah, is pleasing to God, especially because it speaks of Jesus and His perfect obedience to His Father in the giving Himself over to death for us. When the Father looked down on this sacrifice, He sees Jesus, for it points to Jesus and His perfect atoning sacrifice. If we say that it's all about Jesus, it's because it really is all about Jesus. God is pleased with the sacrifice. God provides the sacrifice. God is pleased with the sacrifice. But then thirdly, we find that God promises on the grounds of sacrifice. You see, in the passage, God goes on to make a promise. A number of promises, but we can think of it as one big promise. First of all, what is the promise? Well, let's just read what the passage says. Verse 21, we read,

Well, that's the content of the promise. It is, in summary, a promise to preserve, a promise to preserve the planet, to preserve the earth, and very particularly in order that men and women, the human race, can live on it and multiply and fill it, as was God's intention. The language of verse 22 covers three primary areas of human existence critical to the preservation of the race. Agriculture, weather, time, the seasons, all critical to the preservation of the earth. So, that's the promise. But why do we say that it is a promise on the grounds of sacrifice? Really, the question is, how does the promise relate to the sacrifice that has been offered? Well, what we can certainly say is that in the passage, the promise, as a matter of fact, textually flows from the sacrifice. The connection is so very clear. We've read the verse, The Lord smelled the pleasing aroma and said in His heart, Never again will I curse the ground. So, the connection there in the text is so evident. It's very clear that the sacrifice is what leads on to the promise that God gives. We can see that clearly enough, but why? What is the connection? Let me say three things in that connection. First of all, I want you to notice the, we might say, the surprising basis of the promise to preserve. Let me just introduce that by saying that you might imagine that a promise to preserve would be conditional on obedience. You might imagine that God would have said, well, this is a new start, a renewed creation, and I want to preserve this new creation, but you know, Noah, you've got to obey. And if you obey, and if your sons obey, and if your sons' sons obey, well, then I'll preserve the creation. You might have thought that's what God would have said.

That might have seemed a reasonable thing to say. After all, God's reason for destroying the earth was precisely man's sin. We just remind ourselves how in chapter 6 and from verse 5, we read God's reason for the flood, for destroying the earth. The Lord saw how great man's wickedness on the earth had become, and that every inclination of the thoughts of his heart was only evil all the time. The Lord was grieved that he had made man on the earth, and his heart was filled with pain. So the Lord said, I will wipe mankind, whom I have created from the face of the earth. And he goes on. So here in chapter 6, he's saying very clearly the reason for the flood, the reason for destroying the earth, is man's sin. And yet here we have seemingly the exact opposite. Because here what God is saying is, I will preserve the earth. I won't destroy the earth. Why? Because of man's sin. It's precisely because man is evil that God here in chapter 8 promises to preserve. Now what is that all about?

[ 23 : 39 ] Well, I think we can say this, that God knows, and of course he always knew, this isn't some new discovery for God, but God knows that the sin problem, which is the heart problem of men and women, of you and me, the sin problem will never be ultimately solved by judgment and curse and punishment of sinners. That simply isn't going to cut the mustard, because you kill one and another one springs up. You know, I'm punished for my sin that I commit today, and then tomorrow I sin again.

It's just a cycle that is never ending. Another solution is needed. And the sacrifice that has just been offered by Noah, that we've been able to identify as an atoning sacrifice, explains what the other solution determined by God is. Atoning sacrifice. A sacrifice for our sin.

So you have the surprising basis of the promise to preserve that helps us understand the connection between the sacrifice and the promise. But then we can also say this, or can comment along these lines, and that is the purpose of the promise to preserve. God makes His promise, I won't destroy the earth again as I've done. I'll preserve the earth. But what's the purpose of that? Why does God preserve the earth to this day? Is it only an act of kindness towards man that will allow him, that will allow us to fill the earth as directed by God without fear of imminent cataclysm? Well, it certainly is an act of kindness on the part of God. It certainly does allow us to fill the earth as directed by God. It is that, but it is more than that. The preservation of the earth will provide God with the opportunity in His time to send His Messiah to solve the sin problem definitively and completely. And of course, we know that is exactly what God did. In the fullness of time, into this preserved earth came Messiah Jesus to deal with sin once and for all, and to do so by means of sacrifice, by the offering of Himself.

And so, again, we find that sacrifice lies at the heart of this promise to preserve. But let me just say one further thing about how the promise of God is grounded in sacrifice.

Let me say this, that the end envisaged in the promise to preserve, well, let's consider what the end envisaged is in the promise to preserve. Well, notice what God says there in verse 22. And with this, we're drawing things to a close. In verse 22, we read, in the language of the promise, as the promises be made, God says, as long as the earth endures, seed time and harvest, cold and heat, as long as the earth endures. Now, in the language that's employed there, I think the implication is clear enough that this earth, as currently constituted as it was at the time of Noah and to this day, this earth, corrupted by sin, will come to an end. The hint, and I think we can only call it a hint at this stage. In the light of the fuller revelation, we can draw more from it. But at this stage, we can only speak of it, I think, as a hint. The hint is of a new creation. As long as the earth endures, it won't endure forever as currently constituted, but as long as it does, this is my promise. But the hint, the suggestion is that there is a day coming when there will be a new earth, a renewed earth, a new creation. A new creation where fellowship with God is no longer dependent on sacrifice. In the light of the fuller revelation of Scripture, we know that such a new creation is indeed on God's agenda. A new heaven and a new earth secured by the perfect sacrifice of Jesus and to be inaugurated on His return in glory. A new creation, a new Eden where the constant worship of God's people will be directed to the Lamb that was slain. God provides a sacrifice. God is pleased with the sacrifice, and God promises on the grounds of sacrifice. And when we put it in these terms, terms that I think do justice to the passage here in Genesis, can we not just say, and do we not recognize that this is the gospel? This is the gospel. God provides a Savior, His dear Son, Jesus.

[ 28 : 44 ] God is pleased with the sacrifice of the one He provides. He is pleased with the sacrifice of Jesus, and indeed pleased with all who approach Him in Jesus, trusting in Christ. And God promises all His promises to His people, grounded in the perfect sacrifice of His Son and what that has achieved on our behalf. And so here in the midst of time, at the dawn of this renewed creation, we find the gospel, the gospel of grace of a God who loves us, of a God who knows that we are sinners, and that the only answer to our sin is atoning sacrifice, and He provides that sacrifice for us.

Let us look to the one He has provided. Let us look to Jesus, our Savior, the one who died for us. Let us pray.