



God remembered Noah. God scatters at Babel

See Tutorial 1.6 notes for overall instructions.
The portions of Scripture referred to in this tutorial are:
Genesis chapters 8, 9, 10 and 11:1-9.

Last time

In the Narrative of His interaction with man, God gave a brief record of the first 10 generations of Seth's line. Then His account of He, the Creator, disgusted and broken hearted at man's evil disregard for Him deciding He'll destroy the degenerate human race. The one exception, Noah, and his family, because of his faith, were to be saved and animal species preserved. The boat was built, they entered by the one door, they were securely shut in by God...then the unimaginable destruction by a catastrophic, global flood. Every human and much of the animal life outside was destroyed, only the living contents of the boat are saved.

God completes the rescue, making the flood recede

God didn't forget the boat floating along with its precious cargo. (Genesis 8:1-4) It says that He "remembered Noah" and all in the boat. He had them in mind, had His eye on them. His rescue of Noah and family from the global destruction was His plan from first to last and He made sure it was completed. He caused, or "sent", a wind to blow until the waters receded, mountain tops appeared like islands, and 5 months from the time the flood began, the boat came aground on the mountains of Ararat in modern day Turkey.

These events which can be so easily taken for granted are – or should be, to us - amazing examples of God's control over every part of His Creation. The record reflects this – it is stated simply, without fanfare or elaborate defense. It's His Story and He gives us the choice whether to believe it and then make appropriate efforts to understand how the physical (geological, chemical, socio-historical) record confirms it, OR to start with human pre-supposition and *then* contort, or even reject as unscientific myths, His account of how all these things took place. In light of that, it's worth considering the confusion and

deception that God's Enemy specialises in, and his ability to use the most sophisticated packaging.

They left the boat and acknowledged God

As can be imagined, it took some time from their grounding on the mountaintop until the water had receded enough for them to leave the boat and begin their new lives. (Genesis 8:5-14)

Finally God gave the word and they climbed out and released the animals. (Genesis 8:15-19) We can only speculate about the range of emotions they experienced as the only humans left on the planet. One thing we do know is that they gratefully acknowledged that it was God who had rescued them. In fact, the first thing the Narrative records is Noah building an altar, a platform of stones, and killing specific animals and birds and then burning them there.

Think about it...these animals had been in the boat with Noah and family for just over a year. Now, the innocent animals that shared the safe haven of the boat, have lost their lives.

God took no pleasure (He later tells us) in the innocent deaths of creatures He'd created. But He was willing to pay that price, and much, much more, it turns out, in pursuit of a relationship with His image-bearers, even as degenerate as they now were/are. They had turned away as a race, chosen rebellion, evil, the side of the Enemy, but He would respond in grace and love to even one who would approach by faith, on His terms, with innocent animal blood shed and life taken, to represent the lot that was, rightly, theirs. And that's what happens here. (Genesis 8:20-22) God, He says, is pleased at the aroma coming from the sacrifice – in all it represents.

And as Noah stands there looking out from that mountain at the recently flooded landscape, God stretches a rainbow out in the sky and says that it symbolises a firm promise He's making that he will not destroy the earth in that way again. Here's a perfect example of something that *can* be defined only in materialistic terms - sun-light being refracted from water particles in the air, usually after recent rain, OR that can be *first of all* seen as a part of God telling His story, writ large in the sky...only *then* to be described in the lesser, subservient and limited "story" of physics and science.

The descendants of Noah's three sons

The Narrative moves on from this point to describe the repopulating of the earth after the universal destruction of the Flood. Noah's three sons, Ham, Shem and Japheth, are identified (Genesis 9:18,19) as the forebears or progenitors of the entire population of the earth from the flood to now. God records some early generations (Genesis 10), giving many insights into the way nations developed. Again, the way that we resolve any apparent conflicts between God's Account (recorded here as the book of Beginnings – i.e. Genesis) and the *positivist* claims of *ethno-history* will depend on our pre-

conceptions, faith level commitments, about who the primary Storyteller really is.

The tower

Now the Account moves forward to a time more than 3 generations after the Great Flood. A civilisation that had settled in a plain of Babylonia, a part of the Middle East which would later be called Mesopotamia. (Genesis 11:1-4) And the picture is not a pretty one from God's perspective. Remember that the great-grandparents of these people had been eyewitnesses of the global destruction and had been in the boat God had used to preserve them and the animals. But already they had moved far away from an appropriate appreciation of Him as Creator. They had given up coming to Him in the way He had graciously given to humans after the fall – in faith, with the sacrifice of animals. They were telling their own stories; in fact, a concerted effort was made to have their story as a people, a civilisation told in the form of a great tower or ziggurat for all to see. It was to reach to the sky. A monument to them. A means of physical protection and a way of preserving their reputation for history.

It is not difficult to see the hand of the Enemy in all of this. It reeks of his arrogant ambition to supplant God's rightful place. It's ironic then, that the name of the tower, Babel, is associated not with great success and unity, but with failure and dispersion.

The scattering

God, knowing their arrogant intentions, is unwilling to let them gather their strength and resources together in a concerted denial of their need for Him, their Creator. (Genesis 11:5-9) Over the centuries and millennia since, many other civilisations and countless individuals have literally or metaphorically shaken their fist in defiance at God. Sometimes the results are immediate, more often God graciously gives them opportunity to see their foolishness. But in every case, the results have been, and always will be, the same. He will not let anyone else take over His role as the Writer and Teller of His Story.

Fascinatingly, God does something to the post-flood civilisation that makes it impossible for them to tell their story to each other as a homogenous group. In tangible terms, it made cooperation on their audacious project impossible. He targeted something He'd gifted man with in the first place but which was now taken for granted – speech, the ability to communicate tangible facts as well as ideas and abstract concepts. His Narrative simply says that He confused their languages and this had the effect of scattering them over the world. This, of course, has enormous implications for the *ethno-history* of the earth, as extended family groups expanded and gradually moved out from the Mesopotamian plains, heading south into Africa, east into Asia and beyond.

Also, it should be noted, it forced the fulfillment of His original intention for man, which was to populate the earth.



DISCUSSION POINTS

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1. If you were to ask people in the community if it was right for God to destroy almost all human life because of their rebellion against Him, their creator, what do you think they would say? (Of course this would be a purely hypothetical question for the many who don't believe in a creator God.) How would you lay out a compelling argument for the justice of God's actions?
2. How does it impact you personally to think about God providing a way of escape from His judgment on mankind for those who believed Him, and that in the middle of all the widespread chaos and destruction He was concerned about them personally?
3. What do you think about the idea that we are just as prone to idolatry in our cultural context as those who venerate actual physical representations of gods or God? Think of some of the less obvious things or ideas that people devote themselves to, or that they rely on, to the point that they are substitutes for God's proper place in their lives.
4. Without going beyond the truth established in these lessons so far, share any thoughts that come to mind about God scattering people through creating language divisions. Would you agree that on the surface it might seem to make more sense to have everyone in one place, speaking the same language? So how do you think this might serve His purpose of calling people to repent and trust only in Him for their needs?



ACTIVITIES

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There is no written assignment, just the following research activities:

1. Do some personal research on current views of the Original Human Language, begin by reading the introduction to the Wikipedia article on “The Origin of Language.”
2. Browse an Ethnologue map of the world’s current living languages.