

Prayer

Lord Jesus, You lived a life amongst ordinary people during troubled times; and despite all that was happening, You healed the sick, preached the Good News, set people free and teach about God's Kingdom. In these and in many other ways, You did the will of God the Father, and brought salvation to a hurting world, not just for people of Your day, but for all people for all time. We praise You, Lord Jesus: AMEN.

Other Prayer Suggestions

Weekly Theme: Nuclear power

Pray for those government departments with the responsibility of the regulation and control of the nuclear industry. Pray for wisdom and integrity amongst those concerned.

On-going prayers

- *Pray for Madagascar, and the political unrest there*
- *Give thanks for the food you eat and the God who gave it*
- *Pray for all those working to expose injustice in the world*

Meditation

Start by listening carefully;

Hear the voice of the Lord, and determine to walk forever in His ways.

Learn intelligently;

Know what God commands and requires of you; this is a light to your path.

Plan realistically;

Measure yourself against the righteousness of God, as found in Christ.

Work diligently;

Give your all for the Kingdom of God and its fruitfulness here on earth.

Evaluate shrewdly;

Seek to discern what is right or wrong, good or evil, and act accordingly.

Share liberally;

For the Lord has charged His people to love one another without exception.

And speak boldly;

Preach the Gospel through every means available to you, and be blessed!

Bible Study - Genesis 9:8-17

⁸ Then God said to Noah and also to his sons, ⁹ 'Take notice; I am founding my Covenant with you and your descendants after you ¹⁰ and with all living creatures with you; everything living that came out of the Ark with you, the birds, the domestic animals, and every wild animal. ¹¹ I now set up my Covenant with you; never again will all flesh be destroyed by the waters of a flood. Never again will a flood wipe out the earth.'

¹² God said, 'This is the sign of the Covenant I am making between me and you and every living creature with you for all future generations: ¹³ I have put my rainbow in the clouds, and it will be a sign of the Covenant between me and the earth. ¹⁴ When I bring clouds over the earth and the rainbow is seen in the

clouds, ¹⁵ I will remember my Covenant between me and you and every kind of living creature; and the waters will never again destroy all flesh by turning into a flood. ¹⁶ Whenever the rainbow is in the clouds, I will see it and remember the everlasting Covenant which is between God and every kind of living creature on earth.' ¹⁷ God said to Noah, 'This is the sign of the Covenant that I have set up between me and all life on earth.'

Review

This passage of scripture concludes the story of the Flood, and yet it is the beginning of something else. It describes the setting up a Covenant agreement between God and all humanity, through Noah, as promised at the beginning of the story (6:18). Before the Flood, God promised that if Noah and his family proved to be obedient, by building the ark and entering it, then He would save them. Now, after the Flood, and after Noah's faithfulness in all the he had been commanded, God formally 'set up' the covenant agreement, and the whole of this passage describes what this means.

The passage begins with a formal announcement by the Lord, 'take notice ...' (9:8), and He sets out the participants in the Covenant; on the one hand Himself, and on the other hand, all living things that had come out of the ark (9:9,10). In verse 11, the purpose of the covenant agreement is set out, and this is the promise of God the He will 'never again destroy all flesh by the waters of a flood ...' Initially we might think that this statement is a little narrow, because it does not prevent God from acting in wrath in other ways. However, if we think for a moment about the 'world view' of the ancients, this promise takes on a much wider significance. Remember, that 'waters', in their minds, existed above and below the earth and sky, and it was the separation of the 'waters above' and the 'waters below' that gave space for the earth and the heavens to exist (Gen 1:3-6). The Flood, therefore was the epitome of total destruction, a sign of the coming together of the waters and below that indicated the reversal of creation and the destruction of all things. In the light of this, God's covenant now says that He will not destroy His whole creation again due to human sin. This is a promise of faithfulness, and the origin of all we mean by God's 'loving faithfulness', and His covenant 'loyalty'; a theme that runs through the whole of the Old Testament.

All covenant promises in ancient times were made with some kind of sign or symbol as a visible testimony to the agreement, and this is the meaning of the rainbow God set in the sky. The whole passage from verse 12 onwards is a wonderfully poetic passage with repeated words and emphatic themes, all focussing on the majestic description of God's rainbow; and it transports us away from the world of the Flood and the sin which caused it.

The covenant and the rainbow signify a new start for all God's people, and the beginning of scripture's most important theme; the Covenant relationship between God and humanity which will one day result in God's own coming into the world and the salvation offered to us in Christ Jesus. The first 11 chapters of Genesis are frequently referred to as a 'prologue' to the Bible, because they set the scene for all that follows. The Flood marks a crucial turning point in the relationship between God and humanity, because through Noah's obedience, God was able to begin His salvation plan not just for a few people, but ultimately, available for all. We will of course, need to read through the whole of the Old Testament and the New to see how this turns out, but there is no doubt that the road to salvation as we know it starts here.

When we teach young people about the rainbow, or use it as sign of God's benevolent presence in the world, we should also remember that it is a sign that God intends to save those who respond to Him, and do this with absolute certainty. The remarkable thing is that although Noah had to be obedient for the whole process of salvation through the Flood to

work, everything that happened was God's plan, and God's initiative. Nothing was required of Noah apart from this obedience, built on his 'righteousness' in God's sight. In the light of this, we should accept that salvation has always been God's plane, and it is not something we can achieve of demand or work at. God knew that sin was endemic in humanity and He alone could break the power of that sin.

The first thing we must learn about God is that He is the one who has priority in our relationship, and He is the one who has made the plan by which we are saved. There is no point in our following our own ideas about religion and God; this is mere human vanity and wishful thinking. If we want to have a relationship with the God who made the world, then we must seek to find out what He has done for us, not what we can do for Him; moreover, we must accept that the process starts in the heart of God, not in our minds, emotions or spirituality. It remains a hard lesson, which many find difficult to accept, but it is the starting place for the history of salvation in the Bible.

Questions *(for use in groups)*

1. Which part of the verses of today's text have the most meaning for you and why?
2. How does the idea of the Covenant help us understand salvation? What does the word 'Covenant' mean to you?
3. In the light of this study, what does it mean to you to look at a rainbow in the sky? What do you think God does when He sees the rainbow?

Discipleship

Personal comment:

The message I have brought today is one about accepting the sovereignty of God. It is often true that a Christian disciple will assume that they are 'doing God's will', and then discover at some point that the will of God proves to be something bigger than they imagined. Some people find this difficult to cope with; but really, it is a matter of great joy. Surely, if our faith is to be real, our knowledge of the will of God is something that must grow. Personally, I find it incomprehensible that anyone should think they know God's will about something 'completely', we come to know the things of God over time, and the journey of faith is exciting.

Ideas for discipleship programme

- *In what ways do you seek God's will before doing something? Is there anything in your life which happens at God's command, rather than your own will? These are tough questions, but as you consider them, you may find that God will bless you with a deeper knowledge of His will for you.*
- *Pray for those who struggle to believe that God is 'looking for them', and attempting to help them, particularly those who feel that God has abandoned them.*

Final Prayer

When we are unsure of ourselves, Lord God, encourage us by Your presence. May we see Your compassion in the deeds of others, hear Your words in their speech, and feel Your love through their care. May we then find hope, both in others, in ourselves, and in You. AMEN