

## **Genesis 8 (focus v. 1)<sup>1</sup>** ***God Remembers the Left Alone***

### **Introduction**

#### Gen 8:1

But God remembered Noah and all the wild animals and the livestock that were with him in the ark, and he sent a wind over the earth, and the waters receded.

There are some things in life worth remembering.

- We keep pictures of our departed ones. We want to remember them.
- We keep pictures of our wedding day. We want to remember the event.
- We keep pictures of our 21<sup>st</sup> birthday. We want to remember this day when we came of age.
- We keep pictures of our baby's birth. We want to remember this day that ushered us into parenthood.
- We keep pictures of our baptism, graduation, etc. We want to etch these memories in our minds.

Imagine you suddenly lost all these means of memories. Such loss can be very unsettling, and even painful. But the greater fear in human nature is not so much that of forgetting. The greater fear is that of being forgotten.

Today, we look at Gen 8. It is about a family—Noah and his loved ones—floating aimlessly in the ark on the flood waters for more than a year, seemingly forgotten, forsaken and left alone. This chapter is sandwiched between Gen 7 and Gen 9. Gen 7 is about God's wrath in judging the whole of creation on earth (v. 23). Indeed, Gen 7 is a picture of God's unrelenting power of destruction.

On the contrary, Gen 9 paints for us a picture of God's favour towards mankind, not His fury. Instead of decimating mankind out of this world and reducing their numbers to almost zero, Gen 9 tells of God's high regard for human life, not His disdain for all living things. It is a picture of God's desire to preserve life, not to destroy it.

So Gen 8 stands as an important transitional chapter as we move from God's fury towards a sinful world in Gen 7 to God's favour towards an imperfect world in Gen 9.

When you add up all the biblical data given, you discover that Noah spent slightly more than a year in the ark. That's a long time in a cramped space with lots and lots of animals. This was no luxury cruise. The ark was not equipped with a swimming pool. There were no movies, no entertainers, and

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<sup>1</sup> 1984 NIV

no fancy buffets. There was nothing to do but stay in the boat while it floated aimlessly.

Noah and those with him in the ark was left alone for a long time—almost a year. And just when they thought they were all forgotten and forsaken, note the words of Gen 8:1—“But God remembered Noah and all the wild animals and the livestock that were with him in the ark, and he sent a wind over the earth, and the waters receded.” “But God remembered Noah”—this is a very important transitional statement.

### **I. What does it mean to be remembered by God?**

The Bible does not tell us anything about Noah’s personal emotions during the long time he spent in the ark. We know that he was a man of faith who took God at His Word. That’s why he built the ark in the first place. But he was human too. The sea is a lonely place. It could not have been easy to be shut up inside the ark with his family and all those animals. Did he wonder if God had forgotten, forsaken and left him alone?

Have you ever felt abandoned by God? Have you ever wondered if God has forgotten you? One of the greatest human fears is that of being forgotten, forsaken and left alone. It’s not too far fetched to imagine that Noah had felt that way while he was in the ark. He was cut off from the world outside the ark. He probably thought he was cut off from God Himself because there was no word from Him.

Today’s media coverage is almost instantaneous in updating us on the latest news and development in the world. E.g. we saw the fall of Iraq and the terror of 911 right before our eyes on the TV screen as the events happened in real time. Barack Obama’s victory in the US Presidency Election was heard by people all over the world almost as soon as it was announced in the US.

But Noah did not enjoy this privilege in his time. For a long while in the ark, he didn’t know what was going on in the world outside. There was no word from God for a long while. And if Noah had felt left alone, forgotten and forsaken by God, then he’s only and truly human. He was not alone with this sense of being left alone when you need God most.

- The Psalmist says in Psalm 42:9-10 – “I say to God my Rock, ‘Why have you forgotten me? Why must I go about mourning, oppressed by the enemy?’ My bones suffer mortal agony as my foes taunt me, saying to me all day long, ‘Where is your God?’”
- In Jesus Christ we have the supreme example of the only sinless man feeling abandoned. In His darkest moments on the cross. He cried out, “My God! My God! Why have you forsaken me?”

But God remembers those who feel utterly alone in their darkest times because they want to stand on the side of God. Gen 8:1 tells us that God “remembered” Noah. He had stood apart from his wicked generation and

stood with God—he obeyed God up to the point when the flood of judgment came; he obeyed even the seemingly ridiculous task of building an ark in the desert.

When Gen 8:1 tells us that God remembered Noah, it doesn't mean that God has a poor memory; that He actually has forgotten Noah for a time before His memory suddenly jolts Him. “Oops! I have forgotten this poor chap and all those with him in the ark.”

Rather, the word “remember” implies that God in His own time is turning towards something/someone as the object of His special attention. God had not forgotten Noah; He had him in mind all along. But it was only in His time that God chose to turn His attention on Noah. It is like baking cake in an oven—you come to it only at a predetermined time.

The act of remembering Noah by God was an act of His commitment. God committed Himself to keep Noah and his family alive. Hence, “God remembers” is a statement of hope. He remembers those who suffer and keeps His eyes on them. Though they suffer long and often feel forgotten, the Almighty will not abandon them. Though God may seem not to have acted a long time in your/my life, He will surely act one day. In the meantime, our task is to go on in faithful obedience to what He has already shown to you and me.

As God remembered Noah, even so He will remember you and me. There is no trial so severe that it can separate us from the God who loves us.

## **II. How did God remember Noah?**

God remembered Noah and He acted. He didn't act all at once, but by small degrees. First, He sent a wind that would slowly but surely recede away the waters.

- The wind came. But it was only some time later that the ark rested on the mountains of Ararat—on firm ground and not tossing around.
- However, Noah only felt ground underneath but see no mountain tops. It was few months later that he looked through the window and finally saw the mountain tops.
- But God never told him how long the flood would last. So Noah first released a raven. It did not fly back to him. The multitude of corpses and carcasses provided abundant food for the wild raven such that it did not need to fly back into the ark for food.
- Next, he released a dove. It flew back to him because the waters had not dried up enough. Noah wanted to get out, but God indicated “no”.
- He sent out the dove a second time seven weeks later. The bird returned with a leaf on its beak. The waters had receded to below tree-top level. Noah wanted to get out, but God indicated “not yet”.
- Another seven days later, Noah sent out the dove yet again. This time, it never returned. The waters had receded far and wide for the dove to

land its feet. Noah wanted out, but God indicated “coming soon, but still not now”.

- One day, Noah removed the covering of the ark, and the land was dry (v. 13). Noah wanted to get out, but God indicated “hold on just a little while longer”.

It is difficult for human nature to take a “no” or “wait” answer from God. It drains our patience and faithfulness. A lot of times, God chooses to work in our situation not all at once, but a little at a time. He also doesn’t tell us in advance how long before it ends. He just wants us to remain faithful in what He already has shown clearly to us.

But human nature is such that we can endure almost anything if only we know when it will end. That applies to sickness, personal pain, broken relationships, work problem, financial stress, or even watching our loved ones suffer. Whatever it is, we can take it if we know that two weeks from today, our troubles and anxieties will be all over.

Often, it is the not knowing that wears us down. We watch and wait, and wonder and pray as the uncertainty gnaws away on the inside. Our chief question is, “When will all this end?” God’s answer is, “In my time; not one day sooner, not one day later.” While waiting for God’s time, the human struggle as we go through the situation is that God seems to have left us alone for a long, long holiday.

In our haste (or frustration or desperation) we may try to leave the ark too soon. We may try to unhinge the door or climb out through the window. But when we do that, we slip and slide through the mud and end up in the waters. It is better that we wait for God’s time, and to trust that our Heavenly Father will give us what we need when we need it.

And just as God showed Noah little signs of Him remembering Noah in his situation, He also does that to us today. God does not always spare us the pain of life, but He gives us signs to remind us that even in our sadness and despair, He remembers us.

James Dobson, founder of “Focus on the Family” Ministry, once related a personal experience in his book *Solid Answers*. He lost four dear friends in 1987—all killed in a tragic private-plan crash. Dobson and his friends were together the night before, and had prayed for their safety on the journey home. The four friends took off early the next morning on their way to Dallas but they never made it. Dobson could never forget that telephone call telling him that the wreckage had been found in a remote canyon ... but there were no survivors. Dobson loved those men like brothers, and he was staggered by the loss.

Two of the bereaved families came and asked Dobson to speak briefly at their loved ones’ funeral. The untimely deaths of such vibrant and deeply loved men seemed to scream for an explanation. Where was

God in all this? Why did He let this happen? Why would He take such godly men from their families and leave them reeling in grief and pain? There were no answers to these agonizing questions. Dobson tried to comfort the bereaved families by reminding that God had not lost control of our lives and that He wanted us to trust Him when nothing made sense.

As those who came for the funeral made their way out of the sanctuary, someone suddenly pointed to the sky and exclaimed, "Look at that!" Suspended above the steeple was a small rainbow. No rain fell that day but only a cloudy sky. Yet this beautiful rainbow appeared above the church.

One of the people standing there had the presence of mind to take a photograph at that moment. When it was developed, there was something that no one saw at the time. There, cradled near the rainbow, flew past a small private plane.

Dobson sensed the Lord comforting himself and the bereaved families with these words—"Be at peace. Your lost ones are with Me, and all is well. This rainbow is a sign to remember."

God gives us "God stories" (not ghost stories!) to keep us going when it would be easier to give up hope.

Besides sending the wind to let Noah know that he was remembered, God also did a second thing. God spoke to Noah again after a long silence. Finally one day just a little more than a year after he had entered the ark, when Noah had perhaps thought that he had been forgotten, forsaken and left alone by God, he heard a voice. It was the voice of the Lord who said, "Come out!" (vv. 15-17). Noah wanted out, and the Lord said, "Yes, it is now!"

In vv. 15-17 the Lord instructed Noah to leave the ark with his family and the animals. As far as we can tell, this is the first time God had spoken to Noah since He told him to enter the ark. The days in between had been a time of silence from heaven. What a long year it must have been inside the ark with the boat drifting aimlessly on the waters. As Noah watched and waited, he went about his duties, wondering when the Lord would speak to him again. Who could blame him if he felt forgotten?

The same thing can happen to any of us. You may come to a time in your life when you feel forgotten and alone. You may think that the gates of heaven are like stone walls, and that your prayers are bouncing back at you. You may lack the sense of God's presence so that you feel abandoned and left to face life on your own.

Day after day, Noah had to get up and take care of his responsibilities in the ark. While he waited for the Lord to speak again, he did the only thing he

could do. He remained obedient. Indeed, we obey God best when we obey Him even in His silence.

When God called Noah to come out of the ark, he obeyed then as he had always obeyed the Lord—from building the ark to entering the ark to waiting for the Lord's time to come out of the ark.

The days of waiting may seem to drag on and on. The sense of being forgotten, forsaken and left alone may be deepening. The presence of God may seem so far away because of His long silence. But while we wait upon the Lord, obey as much as we already know. Stay faithful and do our Christian service. The Lord remembers us ... and we will one day hear His words and see His acts again.

When God finally remembered Noah, the man showed that he remembered his God as well.

### **III. How did Noah remember God?**

When Noah led his household and all the animals to leave the ark, it was into a world that was totally different. The world they had known was gone forever—cities gone, roads gone, homes gone, people gone, geography changed, landmarks all different. Nothing looked the same anymore. Everything was new.

It took great courage to step out of the ark into a brand-new world. It meant leaving behind safety and security. And it meant trusting God for a totally unknown environment. For Noah and his loved ones, leaving the ark meant embarking on a new life with new dangers and new opportunities. When God called Noah and his loved ones out of the ark after a long isolation and into a world that had become so different, they needed faith to trust in the One who's calling them out from their safety zone and taking them on a new journey.

If we are in Noah's situation, we may be afraid to leave the ark because it represents the only security we know even though it is smelly and cramped. Sometimes we pray for a change in our circumstances, but when the moment comes, we are so overwhelmed with fear that we are paralyzed and unable to move.

But remembering that God was leading him, Noah stepped out of the ark in faith and he built an altar to the Lord and sacrificed burnt offerings (v. 20).

God told Noah to leave the ark, and he left the ark. The first thing he did after stepping on dry ground was to build an altar to the Lord. His first act was to publicly thank God for His deliverance. You remember the story of the ten lepers who were healed by Jesus—only one returned to give thanks (Luke 17:11-19). Many people are like the other nine—they received great blessings from the Lord; they enjoyed them; but they forgot to give thanks to the Giver.

But Noah took time to build an altar and make sacrifices to the Lord. After the Flood, Noah could see that God was not only a God of wrath, but also a God of mercy.

Noah recognized that he owed everything to the Lord.

- God warned him.
- God told him to build the ark.
- God designed the ark.
- God called the animals to the ark.
- God shut the door.
- God preserved the ark through the Flood.
- God brought the ark to a safe place.
- God told Noah when it was safe to leave the ark.
- God did it all!

Noah's act of worship after he came out of the ark was his way of saying, "I should have perished in the Flood, but God in His mercy delivered me."

Why did Noah build an altar and offer sacrifices to God?

- He wanted to please God.
- He desired the fellowship of God.
- He wanted to give praise and thanks.
- He wanted to express his commitment to God and to give Him 1<sup>st</sup> place in his life.
- He wanted to draw near to God.

Has God been good to you this day? Have you been blessed by Him over the years? Have you remembered to remember God like Noah after he came out of the ark? Are you still feeling short-changed or discontented, and complaining? Or are you giving thanks and praise, and desiring to get closer to God?

## Conclusion

If you are feeling forgotten, forsaken and left alone, take heart that God remembers you just as He had always remembered Noah. He doesn't clear all things for you at one go. He often leads you through a little at a time. He wants you to continue to obey and remain faithful with those things He has already shown clearly to you.

And if God has shown His remembrance of you, have you responded to His grace and goodness by remembering Him? Perhaps, now is the time to remember God by building your altar of remembrance.

- Take time to give thanks.

- Take time to pray.
- Speak up for Jesus.
- Commit to do His will.