

## SESSION 52: GOD REMEMBERS NOAH

Genesis 7:23-8:3

December 8, 2024

### **PREFACE**

The passage before us in Chapter Eight raises a few questions in our minds; for example,

- If it was necessary for God to “remember” Noah (8:1), does this mean He had forgotten him?
- If the water was so deep and pervasive that it covered the mountains, when it eventually “receded from the earth” (8:3), where did it go?

These we will answer in due course, but let’s first finish Chapter Seven.

### **Read Genesis 7:23-8:3.**

#### **vv21-22**

As Chapter Seven closes we have, of course, more repetition, but we can glean something from it. If we back up to vv21-22 and note certain phrases, we can see a purpose in this reiteration.

**And all flesh that moved on the earth breathed its last, that is birds and cattle and beasts and every swarming thing that swarms upon the earth, as well as all mankind. All in whose nostrils was the breath of the spirit of life—of all that was on the dry land—died. (emphasis added)**

v21: “all flesh”

v21: (depending on your version) “breathed its last,” “died,” “perished”

v22: “the spirit of life”

Now go back to Chapter Six. In the LSB v17 reads

**“As for Me, behold I am bringing the flood of water upon the earth, to destroy all flesh in which is the breath of life, from under heaven; everything that is on the earth shall breathe its last.”**

In vv21-23 of Chapter Seven Moses, by the Spirit of God, uses some of the very same language God used in pronouncing the judgment He was about to send upon life on the earth, thus confirming that God did precisely what He said.

At the same time we should recognize a small *difference* in yet another phrase from one used before. Go back to Chapter Two.

## Read Genesis 2:7.

“Yahweh God...breathed into [Adam’s] nostrils the breath of life.”

Here in v22,  
“the breath of the spirit of life”

Leupold points out that here there is a distinction drawn between the personal breath of God that animated man, and the breath which animates all living beings.

*Leupold:* Here in v. 22 the expression used is “the breath of the spirit of life,” not the distinctive breath that animates man but the breath by which the Spirit of life, God’s Holy Spirit, animated living beings.

A rather subtle difference between the two, but perhaps a better takeaway is the commonality: *Both* are supplied by God. The lost will dispute it to their dying day, but *all* creatures are given life by Him, and *all* humans are made in His image. There is the tragedy: rejected by His own offspring.

### v23

**Thus He blotted out every living thing that was upon the face of the land, from man to animals to creeping things and to birds of the sky, and they were blotted out from the earth; and only Noah remained, and those that were with him in the ark. ❏**

“Every living thing” translates *kol yequm*, all standing substance or all existence.

Here is the final, “solemn, if not intentionally dreary” (Leupold) reiteration of what God (“He”) has just done on and to this globe. He has wiped the slate clean so that He might start all over again—this time from Noah’s sons instead of Adam’s—although, of course, still in the same line.

This painful chapter ends with the cold, matter-of-fact statement that “the water prevailed upon the earth 150 days.” That is, for five months (which most believe included the forty days and forty nights) the mighty water conquered the earth. The deep flood held the entire globe in its watery grip, not just drowning the earth’s inhabitants, but rearranging its geography, re-sculpting the earth’s surface to a dramatic, and rather incredible, extent.

v8:1

*Then God remembered Noah and all the beasts and all the cattle that were with him in the ark;*

Some commentators interpret God “remembering” Noah (*zakhar*) as an *anthropomorphism*—something expressed in human terms so we can understand it. That may be the case, but I’d like to add another layer to it. Certainly no one is going to claim that Yahweh God actually *forgot* Noah; *zakhar* is used a number of times to express God showing kindness, granting requests, or delivering from harm. For example, in Genesis 30:22 Moses writes,

**Then God remembered Rachel, and God listened to her and opened her womb. So she conceived and bore a son and said, “God has taken away my reproach.” And she named him Joseph, saying, “May Yahweh give me another son.” (Genesis 30:22–24)**

The text tells us that God “remembered” not just Noah, but all that were in the ark. And the extra layer I would add to this “remembering” is that during the latter portion of Chapter Seven Yahweh Elohim has been focused on the *destruction* of the earth and the living things on it. Now His remembering the inhabitants of the ark means He has now changed His focus from destruction to *salvation*. The destruction of the old has been accomplished; now it is time to begin again—and that will start with the removal of the water from the face of the earth.

*...and God caused a wind to pass over the earth, and the water subsided.*

I confess I have had to chew on this quite a bit. My regular sources were of little help in answering the question, *Where did all the water go—and when?*

It is frustrating when—and it seems to occur regularly—the text leaves you with a fundamental question and all the scholars just pass over it without mention.

The first reason for this struggle is found in v2:

**Also the fountains of the deep and the floodgates of the sky were closed, and the rain from the sky was restrained;**

This describes the closing of the sources for the water: the subterranean fountains and the torrential rain from above. All well and good—but if those sources are literally “closed” (and the Hebrew means that they were “shut up”) then that would mean

that the water they shed could not flow back into the space from whence it came—most importantly, the water could not flow *back* into the subterranean vaults! The water would have to recede to some other place—and where else would that be? Yet, in v3 we are told that “the water receded from the earth, going forth and returning.” To where did it return if the subterranean vaults had just been shut?

The wind of v1 certainly would *contribute* to evaporation of the water—but common sense tells us that it would have to be augmented by some supernatural force to have a meaningful and timely effect upon that much water, and we, of course, cannot discount an “act of God” in this.

And regarding that phrase in v3—“the water receded from the earth, going forth and returning”—sometimes you just have to love the intellectual wisdom coming from our varied commentators. No matter the topic, no matter the Scripture passage, one will—if not often, at least inevitably—be faced with one saying black and another saying white.

I was amused this week to read the following from Leupold regarding the phrase, “and the water receded from the earth, going forth and returning”—

The double infinitive absolute appended to the finite verb would yield a connection which might be rendered: “they subsided going and returning,” which amounts to: “they subsided with **a very pronounced fall**” (emphasis added).

—followed by this from Matthew Henry:

Then the effect ceased; not all at once, but by degrees: The waters abated (Gen. 8:1), returned from off the earth continually, Heb. they were going and returning (v. 3), which denotes **a gradual departure** (emphasis added).

I won't bore you with the details, but only point out that Leupold is the one probably correct. Considering the vast amount of water, it retreated at a pretty good clip. Again, this would seem to speak against the wind *by itself* being a determining factor.

*...and at the end of 150 days the water decreased.*

Finally, before we reach a conclusion on this, there is one more fly in the ointment.

When v3 ends with “and at the end of 150 days the water decreased,” there is no consensus on whether this refers to the original 150 days in v7:24, or refers to an *additional* 150 days of drying time. Leupold believes it refers to the original 150 days.

Of our versions, only the LSB and NASB seem to suggest by their wording that after the 150 days of the water “prevailing,” they decreased, which could be read, began to recede.

The rest of our versions seem to suggest—primarily by their verb tenses—that this could refer to an additional 150 days. For example, the ESV has, “At the end of 150 days the waters had abated,” and the NIVs have, “At the end of the hundred and fifty days the water had gone down”—in other words, past tense. But with my extremely limited understanding of Hebrew tenses, the original is *not* in the past tense, but rather is a future or incomplete tense.

After all that, then, how do we answer the question, *To where did the water return if the subterranean vaults had just been shut?* To my mind, a determining factor for this is *when* the displacement of geological features took place. Look again at Psalm 104.

### **Read Psalm 104:5-9. NASB or LSB**

Look especially at v8-9. The other versions seem to confuse the waters with the valleys, but I believe the NASB and LSB have it clearly:

**The mountains went up; the valleys went down  
To the place which You founded for them.  
You set a boundary that they may not pass over,  
So that they will not return to cover the earth.**

That is, v8 refers to the geological mountains and valleys being moved, while v9 refers to the “waters”—clearly understood from the boundaries being set so that “they [the waters] will not return to cover the earth.” It would make no sense to say that the *valleys* “will not return to cover the earth,” even in poetry.

So the question is, *When did this geological shifting described in Psalm 104 take place?* We made the point in our previous session that certainly there was rearranging of the surface of the earth from the outset of the Flood. But if this raising of the mountains and lowering of the valleys occurred early on, that would mean that at the end of the 150 days—the cessation of new waters being added to the Flood—those deep valleys would already be filled with water.

But if the raising of the mountains and lowering of the valleys occurred right about at the end of the 150 days, this would give us an answer for the question, *Where did all the water go?* Psalm 104:8b-9 gives us the answer:

**...the valleys went down  
To the place which You founded for them.  
You set a boundary that they [i.e., the waters] may not  
pass over,  
So that they will not return to cover the earth.**

This would mean that

- the initial Creation was of an earth with far less extremities, mountains and valleys, than it has now; not necessarily a smooth marble, but lower mountains and shallower valleys;
- this would mean that the Flood did not have to be miles and miles in depth to cover the highest peaks;
- and if the sudden raising of the mountains and lowering of the valleys (including today's oceans) occurred right about the time when the Inundation ceased, this would create new basins for the Flood water in which to recede—and at a fairly rapid rate.

Thus by v3 we have the beginning of the end of the dramatic Inundation of the earth. Noah, his family, and all the beasts have been *preserved* throughout the raging Flood, but they remain locked inside the ark—Yahweh personally shut them inside the ark (7:16), and He will be the one to command them to disembark (8:15ff).

And the waters will now begin to recede.

# SESSION 52

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## vv21-22

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## 150 Days

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## Where did the water go?

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- this would mean that the Flood did not have to be miles and miles in depth to cover the highest peaks;
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