

Noah Builds an Altar

Lemarcus was bent over, polishing the chrome rims of his SUV, when he heard his name. He turned his head and saw a large pair of black tennis shoes. His gaze traced up from the shoes to the large man wearing them. “Khalil?”

“Yeah, man. I thought that was you,” said Khalil.

Lemarcus stood, and the two exchanged a handshake and shoulder bump.

After complementing the work, Khalil said, “I’ve been missing you at church. How’s it going?”

It wasn’t a rebuke, but Lemarcus didn’t know how to respond. He hadn’t been to church in “a month of Sundays,” as some of the older folks used to say.

It wasn’t just his church attendance that was waning. His prayer time fallen off, and he could feel that he wasn’t seeking Christ like he once had. He didn’t know exactly how it all began.

At the fast-food restaurant where they later met for lunch, the two men laughed, talked, and caught up.

“I’d really like to see you at church,” said Khalil.

“Man, people probably don’t even remember me.”

“They certainly do, but more importantly, God does,” Khalil said, looking directly at his friend. “You can’t be gone too long or go too far from the Lord to keep Him from loving you.”

Lemarcus realized it was what he wanted—needed—to hear. “Thanks, man. I want to be there tomorrow.”

1. When have you struggled to trust God and His ways?

2. When is a time that you’ve seen God restore someone who wandered?

Dry Land

Genesis 8:13–17 KJV

13 And it came to pass in the six hundredth and first year, in the first month, the first day of the month, the waters were dried up from off the earth: and Noah removed the covering of the ark, and looked, and, behold, the face of the ground was dry. 14 And in the second month, on the seven and twentieth day of the month, was the earth dried.

15 And God spake unto Noah, saying, 16 Go forth of the ark, thou, and thy wife, and thy sons, and thy sons' wives with thee. 17 Bring forth with thee every living thing that is with thee, of all flesh, both of fowl, and of cattle, and of every creeping thing that creepeth upon the earth; that they may breed abundantly in the earth, and be fruitful, and multiply upon the earth.

Genesis 8:13–17 NIV

¹³ By the first day of the first month of Noah's six hundred and first year, the water had dried up from the earth. Noah then removed the covering from the ark and saw that the surface of the ground was dry. ¹⁴ By the twenty-seventh day of the second month the earth was completely dry.

¹⁵ Then God said to Noah,

¹⁶ "Come out of the ark, you and your wife and your sons and their wives.

¹⁷ Bring out every kind of living creature that is with you—the birds, the animals, and all the creatures that move along the ground—so they can multiply on the earth and be fruitful and increase in number on it."

Noah and his family's journey comes to an end as the floodwaters subside and the earth becomes dry once more (Gen. 8:13). They would emerge from the ark to inhabit an unfamiliar world. From the dates in Genesis 7:11 and Genesis 8:14, it appears that the family spent over a year aboard. But at last, God lets Noah know when it is safe to exit (Gen. 8:16).

God instructs Noah with many of the same words as the initial blessing upon humanity in Genesis 1:28: "Be fruitful and increase in number." God has not rejected creation, and He is renewing it by allowing creatures to fill the

earth, just as originally intended. God's judgment, while an entirely fair response to the murder and wickedness that had spread across the earth, did not mean that He withdraws the blessing.

3. *What kinds of questions would Noah have after witnessing God's cataclysmic flood?*

4. *How are the words "multiply" or "be fruitful" words of blessing?*

An Altar

Genesis 8:18–22 KJV

18 And Noah went forth, and his sons, and his wife, and his sons' wives with him:

19 Every beast, every creeping thing, and every fowl, and whatsoever creepeth upon the earth, after their kinds, went forth out of the ark.

20 And Noah builded an altar unto the LORD; and took of every clean beast, and of every clean fowl, and offered burnt offerings on the altar.

21 And the LORD smelled a sweet savour; and the LORD said in his heart, I will not again curse the ground any more for man's sake; for the imagination of man's heart is evil from his youth; neither will I again smite any more every thing living, as I have done.

22 While the earth remaineth, seedtime and harvest,

Genesis 8:18–22 NIV

¹⁸ So Noah came out, together with his sons and his wife and his sons' wives. ¹⁹ All the animals and all the creatures that move along the ground and all the birds—everything that moves on land—came out of the ark, one kind after another.

²⁰ Then Noah built an altar to the LORD and, taking some of all the clean animals and clean birds, he sacrificed burnt offerings on it. ²¹ The LORD smelled the pleasing aroma and said in his heart: "Never again will I curse the ground because of humans, even though every inclination of the human heart is evil from childhood. And never again will I destroy all living creatures, as I have done."

²² "As long as the earth endures, seedtime and harvest,

and cold and heat,
and summer and winter,
and day and night
shall not cease.

cold and heat,
summer and winter,
day and night
will never cease.”

Noah, his family, and all the animals step from the ark onto dry land—for the first time in over a year. Noah’s first action is to display gratitude: he builds an altar to the Lord, giving reverence to God for abundant faithfulness and deliverance. By offering burnt sacrifices on the altar, Noah acknowledges God’s sovereignty and provision. For that matter, God had even instructed Noah to bring along enough animals to account for the sacrifice (Gen. 7:2–3).

God responds with favor on Noah’s sacrifice: He accepts Noah’s offering, signified by the language of its “pleasing aroma” (Gen. 8: 21). Already, God begins describing the foundations for what will become a covenant agreement (Gen. 8:21–22). God vows to never again curse the ground or destroy all living creatures, despite the evil in the human heart. This proclamation reveals God’s sovereign decision to extend a measure of mercy and grace, despite humanity’s sin.

The passage concludes with a commitment from God to supervise the continuity of creation (v. 22). “As long as the earth endures,” God shall ensure the smooth transitions of everything that humans need for life: the changing seasons, cycles of day and night, and the passage of time.

5. Why does Noah build an altar after leaving the ark?

6. What commitments in this text show God’s compassion and mercy?

An Agreement

Genesis 9:11–13 KJV

11 And I will establish my covenant with you; neither shall all flesh be cut off any

Genesis 9:11–13 NIV

¹¹ I establish my covenant with you: Never again will all life be destroyed by the waters

more by the waters of a flood; neither shall there any more be a flood to destroy the earth.

12 And God said, this is the token of the covenant which I make between me and you and every living creature that is with you, for perpetual generations: 13 I do set my bow in the cloud, and it shall be for a token of a covenant between me and the earth.

of a flood; never again will there be a flood to destroy the earth."

¹² And God said, "This is the sign of the covenant I am making between me and you and every living creature with you, a covenant for all generations to come: ¹³ I have set my rainbow in the clouds, and it will be the sign of the covenant between me and the earth."

After the flood, God establishes a covenant—a binding agreement—with Noah and all life (v. 11). This covenant is a promise that God will never again flood the earth in response to human sinfulness. The promise sets up the world that we face, where sin is allowed to persist for now, even though we can count on the fact that God will uphold justice on an eternal timeline. God extends these assurances to all future generations (v. 12).

God's covenant is accompanied by a symbol: the rainbow (v. 13). It is a visible sign of God's power and a reminder of His mercy and grace, even in the aftermath of harsh judgment.

The first covenant that God makes is foundational for displaying His character and desire for relationship with creation. It reveals God's patience, willingness to extend grace, and His desire for reconciliation. God wants life to continue. The rainbow reminds humans of their reconciling God.

7. *How does the world change after the covenant with Noah and the promises that God makes?*

8. *What can we learn about God's reconciling character from this chapter?*

God's Daughter

My sisters and I grew up in a small town in Pennsylvania, where we attended the local African Methodist Episcopal church. Our church membership was a little more than a hundred people, including children. We were not anonymous! We had to participate in Sunday school and services every Sunday. If there was an afternoon worship service, we had to stay for that too. Vacation Bible school was also mandatory, at least in my family.

You might think, with all that church training, my siblings and I were prepared for whatever life would throw at us. But as adults, we had more than our share of struggles. Many of us lost the habit of going to church at all. I thought I was too busy with a career, one of my sisters fell into addiction, and another was on the verge of divorce when diagnosed with late-stage colon cancer.

And God was faithful to each of us, despite the ways we had prioritized things other than God. It took several years before I was ready to rededicate my life to Christ, but God was ready for me. As for my sister, God performed a miracle by reconciling her marriage. With her husband at her side, she faced the cancer treatment with courage and support.

God *is* merciful and compassionate. I've seen it. Even though my sister's cancer treatments failed, she never lost hope for God to heal her. She found a nearby church during her treatment, where she began walking faithfully with Christ. She told us one day, "I feel the presence of God in my bedroom." In one of her last moments, she whispered to me, "I'm God's daughter, and He loves me."

9. *How is God's mercy demonstrated to us?*

10. *Do you tend to think that God provides extra protections and blessings on some people, or do you think that God treats all people the same?*

11. *When has God demonstrated patience and mercy in your life?*

God's Patience and Kindness

Take a moment with God to review your history of walking with Him. You might ask God to remind you of a time that mercy was available to you. Perhaps the moment that comes to mind was when you were walking closely with God. Or, perhaps God will remind you of a moment that He protected and restored you, even when nothing else was going well.

► *Use the space below to write a word or a sentence to remind yourself of God's graciousness in your own story.*

KEY VERSE

I do set my bow in the cloud, and it shall be for a token of a covenant between me and the earth. —Genesis 9:13 KJV

I have set my rainbow in the clouds, and it will be the sign of the covenant between me and the earth. — Genesis 9:13 NIV

DAILY BIBLE READINGS FOR NEXT WEEK'S LESSON

Week of June 9 through June 15

(See *The Quiet Hour* and *Cross* for devotionals on these passages.)

Mon. Genesis 17:15–22—God Promises a Son.

Tues. Romans 4:1–15—Abraham's Righteous Faith.

Wed. Romans 4:16–25—Life Out of Death.

Thurs. Genesis 12:1–7—A Blessing to the Nations.

Fri. Psalms 125–126—Joy for Weeping.

Sat. Hebrews 11:8–12—Abraham's Courageous Faith.

Sun. Genesis 22:1–14—God Will Provide a Lamb.