

Sunday School 9 February 2020 Genesis 6-9: Noah, God's ship builder!

One of the first Bible stories you ever learnt was the story of Noah's Ark. It is such a cute story with all the animals! But this is a far more special story than any little child can realise and is far too important to be a fairy story.

The flood is described in other ancient documents as well – so it clearly happened and was very wide-spread (the whole world, probably means the known world). The Babylonian tale suggests it happened because people made too much noise and they disturbed a grumpy god who was trying to sleep. However, the Bible gives us God's perspective. You know the story – or at least you may think you do, though I suspect there are many details given to Noah that you don't know.

It didn't take long for Adam and Eve's disobedience to become murder (Cain and Abel) and then there was a gradual slide into complete disobedience to God. Only one family seemed to remember that they were all God's children. Eventually only one man seemed to try to live to please his Maker: Noah.

God saw that they were so out of control that all he could do was destroy his world, saving only Noah and his children even though they weren't perfect. The Bible conveys God's sadness.

Noah's family were about to have the adventure of their lives – one which their children and grandchildren talked about with awe! Noah was told to build a 'box' (we call it an 'ark'. It was pretty big – about 133 metres in length (compare this with Dias' boat at Mossel Bay which is 18 metres or with an ocean liner usually about 280 metres).

The instructions Noah was given were specific (Gen 6:15): Noah was told what kind of wood to use (cypress which was plentiful – eco-friendly!); how many animals to bring on board (2 of some and 7 of the animals later regarded as 'clean' i.e. they could be used for sacrifices); he was reminded that he would need food. Unlike other boats of that time it did not have sails – all it had to do was float. It had a roof and a door (also unusual) and 3 storeys. And it was to be lined with pitch, a kind of tar.

We are not told how long it took Noah to gather all the wood, or the food. But it was long enough for the neighbours to watch with amusement. It doesn't seem as though anyone felt that maybe Noah was being wise. They didn't think that they should apologise to God, even though in those months they could have done so.

So, when all was done, Noah and his family (3 sons and their wives) were shut in the ark – God himself shut the door on the day the rain began. The rain lasted 40 days and 40 nights so nothing else survived. But God looked after this family and their boatload of animals. In fact New Testament writers use the ark as a way of describing how God looks after those who follow him.

God went on caring for the family, even after the voyage for he dried up the earth using a strong wind (Gen 8:1). Eventually, after sending out a raven and 2 doves, Noah knew it was

safe to open the door and disembark from the ark which had run aground on the mountains of Ararat (probably in present-day Armenia a landlocked country bordering on Turkey and Azerbaijan and Georgia in Western Asia).

Noah's first action was to praise and thank God by sacrificing some of the 'clean' animals. God promised never again to send a flood of such magnitude that it would destroy the earth. And God told Noah that when he saw a rainbow he was to remember this promise (Gen 9:13).

The flood reminds us that God will not allow wrong to survive. But his rainbow still appears and God's promise still stands. He cares about his world and is incredibly patient with us – allowing us day by day to say we are sorry for all that we do which is wrong.