

Bennoch Church: 26th February 2012

No one knows for certain when the book of Genesis was written, but let's assume, as some scholars have suggested, about 2500 years ago, the time of the Exile or just after. At that time, what would have been their understanding of the size of the world, probably very limited, to only the area that people had actually travelled. They did not know what lay beyond that. So when this flood came, and there are various ancient accounts of such a flood, to them it would seem that the whole world had indeed been flooded. So this event might be based on an actual flood somewhere in the ancient near east.

At that time their understanding of God was also very different. For God to wipe out most of the world, in response to human sin, would not have seemed as drastic as it does to us today; as would happen again in biblical history, the righteous remnant of humanity continues with Noah and his family.

For us to understand this passage, we need to set aside issues of geography and humanity's destruction, to see a theological picture being painted, akin to a parable. This does not mean that a huge flood did not take place, but there is more to this story than that of a natural disaster.

Setting aside the fact that Noah was far from perfect, he obeyed God. But he stands in this story, not as an individual, but as one who represents every person, including you and me. And yes not all the animals were in the ark, how could they be? That is impossible! But that is not the point. Here creation continues, through man's obedience and God's grace, for God as creator was understood to have been totally justified to destroy that creation, yet salvation is secured, dry land is reached, and the rainbow appears, as it would have naturally done so.

The writer in seeing God's hand through all of these events and portrays the rainbow as a sign from God. Never again would God cause such a thing to happen and when the rainbow is seen in the skies it would remind God of his promise to his people. Later on, that promise, that covenant relationship between God and his people would continue, in the promise to Abraham that he would be the father of many nation, in the Law given to Moses, in the words of the prophets, in the person of Jesus Christ and in the giving of the Spirit of God. All these promises, direct interventions of God into his created world.

That's the point. Even before Abraham took the first wandering steps in the paths of God to the future Promised Land, God here gives a sign of his relationship with the entire created world, not just the future Jewish nation. If that relationship had broken down, God was willing even then to show that the relationship could be restored. That is the theological picture and the parable of the sign of the rainbow.

In the baptism of Jesus, he bursts publically into the scene, the climax of God's signs for the salvation of the world. Not in rainbow, tablets of stone or human words, but the word made flesh. If the rainbow was dramatic for the people of the flood, for the people of the Jordan so were the dove and the words of God. As in creation itself and in the story of Noah, God speaks and the Spirit, in the form of a dove, hovers over the water. This is re-creation in the person of Jesus Christ.

Jesus then enters his own 'flood experience', by being tempted in the desert. So 40 days of Water is replaced by 40 days of sand. Even if we feel that we are wandering and struggling in our own desert experience and life is simply hard, the promises of God are the same for us as they were for Noah, Abraham, the prophets and even Jesus. Even if we do not feel that

God is close. Even if we look and do not see him. He is there. The promise is in every rainbow. The promise is in every word of scripture. The promise is in his Son Jesus Christ, who said, take my yoke, put it on and learn from me. The yoke I give you is easy and the load I put on you is light. Jesus shares our burdens. That is his promise to us, a promise that continues, from the time of the rainbow, to when Christ returns. Amen