

Commentary on Genesis (5)

'The Histories of the Sons of Noah' - The Flood (Genesis 6.9b - 10.1a) - TABLET IV

It has been common practise among a large number of scholars to seek to split the flood narrative into different so-called 'documents'. This has partly resulted from not comparing them closely enough with ancient writings as a whole and partly from over-enthusiasm for a theory. There is little real justification for it. Repetitiveness was endemic among ancient writings, and is therefore not a hint of combined narratives, and the intermixture of statistical material, such as dating, with story type is known elsewhere. The interchanging of the divine names Yahweh and Elohim has already been noted as occurring for good reasons (4.25-26; 5.29).

The whole account is a clear unity, and is formulated on a 7 day - 40 day - 150 day - 150 day - 40 day - 7 day pattern (the numbers partly inclusive), taking us from when God commanded Noah to enter the ark to the return of the dove with the olive leaf which showed the Flood was over. The causes of, and purposes for, the Flood are consistent throughout, as are its final aims. There is certainly expansion in thought, but there is no contradiction. (Alternately we may see it as a 7 - 40 - 150 - 40 - 7 pattern depending on how we read 8.3).

The Flood

The word for flood is 'mabbul' which only occurs outside Genesis 6-11 in Psalm 29.10, where its meaning is disputed. In Psalm 29 its use follows the description of an extremely devastating storm 'caused' by Yahweh which strips the trees bare, and 'Yahweh sits enthroned over the flood' may well therefore mean that He causes, and takes responsibility for, even the subsequent cataclysmic flood. But it may alternatively mean that 'Yahweh sits enthroned over the cataclysm', the storm we have just read about. (The writer sees all natural phenomena as under God's control and is using a massive storm and cataclysm as a picture of Jahweh's great power. If the word does mean flood he may well have had Noah's flood in mind). In the New Testament and in the Septuagint mabbul is 'translated' as kataklysmos (Matthew 24.38-9; Luke 17.27; 2 Peter 2.5). It therefore can be taken with some confidence as meaning in this context a 'cataclysmic flood' with the emphasis on the cataclysm.

The basis of the account consistently throughout is that man will be destroyed because of his extreme sinfulness (6.5-7, 11-13; 7.4, 21-23; 8.21). This contrasts strongly with Mesopotamian flood myths where the innocent admittedly die with the guilty, and the flood is the consequence of the anger of gods over some particular thing which annoys them.

How Extensive Was the Flood?

The question must again be raised as to what the writer is describing. There is no question but that it is a huge flood of a type never known before or since, but how far did it in fact reach?

In Hebrew the word translated 'earth' (eretz) even more often means 'land'. This latter fact derived from the fact that 'the earth' (our world) as compared with the heavens (Genesis 1.1), became 'the earth' (dry land) as opposed to the sea (1.10), became 'the earth' (their land) on which men lived (12.1). It is thus quite in accordance with the Hebrew that what is described in this passage occurred in just one part of what we would call the earth, occurring in 'Noah's earth' where Noah was living with his family.

This is not just a matter of choosing between two alternative translations. The reason eretz could be so used was because of how the ancients saw things and applied language to them. To

them there was their known 'earth', their land, and then their land with the surrounding peoples, and then the rather hazy world on the fringes and then beyond that who knew what? Thus to them 'the earth' could mean different things in different contexts.

Even in its wider meaning it meant what was indeed a reasonably large area, and yet from our point of view would be seen as a fairly localised area, and 'the whole earth' to them was what to us would still be limited horizons. We can compare Genesis 41.57 where 'the whole earth' come to Egypt to buy food and 1 Kings 10.24 where 'the whole earth' come to hear the wisdom of Solomon. Compare also how the Roman world and its fringes were 'the world' in the New Testament (Luke 2.1; Acts 24.5; Romans 1.8; Colossians 1.6).

Thus there are three possible answers to the question as to how far the flood stretched, looking at it from the writer's point of view.

- 1). That all mankind was involved and that the Flood was global. However, it could not strictly mean this to the writer, or to Noah, for both were unaware of such a concept. All they could think of was 'the world' according to their conception of it. What the writer could have meant was 'all that there is'. But was he not rather concerned with the world of man?
- 2). That all mankind was involved, but that they were still living within a certain limited area and were therefore all destroyed in a huge flood, which was not, however, global, as it would not need to involve lands which were uninhabited.

The fact of the worldwide prevalence of Flood myths might be seen as supporting one of these two views. So also might the argument that had the area been too limited Noah could have been instructed to move with his family outside the area, however large. Against this latter, however, it could be argued that God was seen as having a lesson to teach to future generations, and that He had in view the preservation of animal life as part of Noah's environment.

- 3). That it was only mankind in the large area affected by the demonic activity (Noah's 'earth' or 'world') that were to be destroyed, and that the Flood was therefore vast, but not necessarily destroying those of mankind unaffected by the situation described.

What cannot be avoided is the idea that the Flood was huge beyond anything known since. It was remembered in Mesopotamia, an area which had known great floods, as '*the Flood*' which divided all that came before it from all that followed (see, for example, the [Sumerian king lists](#)). They too had a memory of how their king Zius-udra survived the Flood by entering a boat and living through it, although in his case others, apart from his family, were seen as surviving with him in the boat. Alternative suggestions offered have been the consequences of the ice age ceasing, raising water levels and causing huge floods, or the falling of a huge asteroid into the sea.

Noah (Genesis 6.9-10)

6.9b-10 'Noah was a righteous man, blameless in his generation. Noah walked with God (Elohim). And Noah had three sons, Shem, Ham and Japheth.'

The three sons are mentioned here as introduction to 'the histories of the sons of Noah' (10.1).

In 6.8 we were told that 'Noah found favour in the eyes of Yahweh'. That was something Noah could have said about himself, a statement of awe at the goodness and mercy of Yahweh. But this verse which exalts Noah must be by a third party. This may well be due to the fact that while the origin of 'this is the history of Noah' was Noah himself, this further account 'this is

the history of the sons of Noah' was the work of his sons.

They could not, of course, have written them down, for writing had not then been invented, but they passed them on orally because of the covenants contained in them, and when writing was established they would later be written down word for word on tablets as sacred evidence of the covenants, with authorship referred to. The recognition of this is found in the descriptions applied to the tablets. Had the titles been invented the latter tablet would surely have been ascribed to Noah in some way, and not to his sons.

This cannot by its nature be proved, but it certainly does seem reasonable, in the light of what happened with covenants elsewhere, that Noah and his sons should ensure that these important covenants should be passed on together with the historical experiences which resulted in them, remembered with awe. Noah would want his sons, and his son's sons, to be aware of the causes of the Flood and the promise and warning that God had given. The sons would want their descendants to know and remember the Flood, and be aware of God's subsequent covenant which included the guaranteeing of future seasons. Such covenants in the ancient world were always remembered in their historical context. This particular one was probably recited at harvest time to remind them and God of His covenant to maintain the seasons.

Note that the name Noah is mentioned three times, with three different affirmations about him, which declared his righteousness, his walk with God and his fruitfulness in having 'three' sons, a 'complete' family. The threefold threeness brings out the 'perfection' of Noah. To the ancient reader threeness conveys a positive idea of completeness, and in a short space the verses define Noah as complete in every way.

The statements about Noah stress his godliness, in contrast with the ungodliness of his world (v.11). They are in three stages, a statement about him - he was righteous - a statement of contrast with his contemporaries - he was blameless in contrast with them - and a statement of his relationship with God - Noah walked with God (compare Enoch - 5.22).

'Righteous' in this context probably means 'right with God' because of his faithfulness to God's covenants and promises, and his continuing in cultic purity (compare 4.26 which suggests the establishment of cultic worship of Jahweh). 'Blameless' means that he refused to enter into the excesses of his contemporaries, as outlined earlier and mentioned in verses 11-12. 'Walked with God' goes even deeper and stresses his unique relationship with God. He knows God in the deepest sense as an honoured friend and guide, as well as creator and judge. Malachi 2.5-6 is very apposite in this connection.

The previous man who walked with God, Enoch, was taken out of the earth because he was too pure for it (5.22). Now God will take another line. He will leave Noah and remove the evil world.

Notice that in this section the references to God are as 'Elohim', as in chapter 1. This is because God is seen as about to act in relation to His creation, as judge of all. When he begins to deal personally with Noah He becomes Yahweh (7.1-5). Later, once the pattern of calling God both Elohim and Yahweh has become more established, the distinction will not always be quite so clear.

Noah had three sons, Shem, Ham and Japheth. Three represents completeness. These would survive with him through the flood as the complete family unit.

The Corruption in the Earth (Genesis 6.11-13)

6.11 'And the earth (or inhabited world or land) was corrupt before God (Elohim), and the

earth (or land) was filled with violence.'

This would appear to be a direct result of 6.1-4 and clearly involved 'the mighty men and men of renown', who were not so much 'heroes' as terrorists and tyrants. What has happened has distorted man's whole being. His behaviour has become corrupt. The word for 'violence' denotes an oppression which is arbitrary by nature. Men no longer just defend themselves, violence has gone to excess. Wanton murder has become rife. This is the final stage of man's descent. First Cain, then Lamech, and now the whole 'earth' (or land). It is unrestrained and widespread.

It must be noted that whatever view we take of the Flood, whether as global, as covering all places where mankind dwelt (but not strictly global), or as covering only the 'whole world' of Noah, it is seen as total within its sphere. There has to be a totally new beginning.

6.12 'And God (Elohim) saw the earth (or land) and behold it was corrupt, for all flesh had corrupted their way on the earth (or land).'

This is not just repetition of verse 11. While there is a certain repetitiveness typical of ancient stories, it adds the fact that, not only was the earth or land corrupt, but that God was making Himself fully aware of the reality of the situation. 'God, the Creator and Judge, saw' it, and saw that it affected 'all flesh', and that none, apart from Noah and his family, were exempt. And seeing it He came to the ultimate decision. It could not be allowed to go on any longer.

But the repetitiveness does serve to bring home the message that is being given - it was like this, and God saw that it was like this. (This was why repetition was used in what was originally oral teaching. People liked repetition, as is evident in myths elsewhere which constantly contained such repetitions, for it brought home the particular points and enabled an element of mental participation like the chorus to a song). The use of the word 'flesh' takes us back to 6.2. Man is now unwilling to submit to the control of God's Spirit. Mankind is now but flesh.

6.13 'And God (Elohim) said to Noah, "I have determined to make an end of all flesh (literally 'the end of all flesh has come before me'), for the earth (or land) is filled with violence through them. Consider then, I will destroy them with the earth (or land).'

Elohim, The Creator and Judge now communicates His decision to the one who walks with Him. He will destroy these men of extreme and uncontrollable violence and begin again.

Note again the stress on man as flesh (true even if 'all flesh' is a stereotyped phrase). The phrase also includes the animal world (e.g. 6.17-19; 7.15-16). By his violence man has shown himself as bestial in his behaviour. He who had been appointed to control the ravages of the animal world has now shown himself to be one with them. He is but flesh. This confirms God's description of man in 6.2. Thus the whole account is a unity.

The Command to Prepare for the Flood (Genesis 6.14-22)

6.14-16 'Make yourself an ark of gopher wood, make rooms (or alternatively 'reeds' - which involves the same consonants, but different vowel signs which were a later addition) in the ark and cover it with pitch both inside and out. And you will make it like this, the length of the ark three hundred cubits, the breadth of it fifty cubits, and the height of it thirty cubits. Make a slit for the entry of light for the ark, and finish it to a cubit in height. And set the opening of the ark in the side of it, and make the ark with first, second and third storeys (or first, second and third layers (of logs)).'

The ark (probably meaning 'box' or 'chest') was well made. It was made of timbers and pitch, possibly mingled with reeds. The slit around the top of about one cubit upwards, which could of course be covered when necessary, enables a view outside when required, keeps the ark safe from too much water entering in the cataclysm to follow, and yet means that no one need see outside while the cataclysm is going on.

An opening in the side was necessary for entry, and would require special sealing. Thus we are told in 7.16 that 'Yahweh shut them in'. How this was done we are not told, but it stresses that God ensured that the ark was secure. Whether it had 'rooms' and 'three storeys', or whether it was made with 'reeds' and 'three layers' (of logs), is open to question. Either way the threeness again represents completeness.

The measurements will not be literal. In the days when Noah lived number words were not in use. But his account (and God's instructions) would use some method to describe the size of the ark and this is 'translated' into number words by the compiler (or earlier).

All the numbers are adjectivally significant, three (hundreds) and three (tens) both representing completeness. It is possible, as later, that five (tens), the number of fingers on the hand, was seen as the number of covenant (hand action was often involved in sealing covenants just as we shake hands on things), or it may have further represented completeness as in ancient Egypt where five certainly had the latter meaning. (Later the flood will be split into two periods of five moon cycles (150 days)). The ark was thus a testimony to the faithfulness of God.

We do not know what shape it was, but it was clearly very large (about five hundred feet or 160 metres long by eighty feet or 26 metres wide at the bottom by fifty feet or 16 metres in height if taken literally) and if its shape narrowed towards the top like a tent it has been demonstrated by using models that it would be unsinkable, except by collision.

The whole point about the measurements was that they were large, that they were God-ordained, and that they expressed a sense of sufficiency and completeness. This was not a boat but simply a huge 'carrier'. It had no method of steering and was made for only one purpose, preservation.

6.17 'And I, behold I, am bringing a cataclysmic flood of waters upon the earth (or land) to destroy all flesh, wherein is the breath (ruach) of life, from under heaven. Everything that is in the earth (or land) will die.'

God outlines the method He will use to destroy the sinful world in which Noah lived, a 'cataclysmic flood of waters' for the purpose of blotting everything out, and especially man.

And He emphasises that it would be His work, and His alone - 'I, behold I', which is emphatic. It is difficult for us to understand the depths to which mankind must have sunk for this to be necessary, and had it not been for the taking over of mankind by demonic activity we might even have questioned whether mankind could have sunk so low. The words express totality of destruction, but only in the area to which they apply. (Later 'every living thing of all flesh' (v.19) can be seen as signifying those within Noah's purview).

6.18 'But I will establish my covenant with you, and you shall come into the ark, you and your sons, your wife and your sons' wives with you' '

We are reminded again that this is a covenant record. This terrible disaster is to be the beginning of a new relationship between man and God. A covenant will be established which will be permanent for mankind, and this account is the background to it (see 8.16 - 9.17).

Only eight people are to be saved from the flood. They are those who have kept themselves pure from demonism and excessive violence, in readiness for the reception of the new covenant. But many of Noah's brothers and sisters will die in the flood along with the rest of mankind, for presumably they too have fallen prey to these evils. We note that, in contrast to Lamech of the line of Cain, Noah is monogamous.

6.19-21 'And of every living thing of all flesh, two of every sort, you will bring into the ark to keep them alive with you. They shall be male and female. Of the birds after their kind, and of the cattle after their kind, of every creeping thing of the ground after its kind, two of every sort will come to you, to keep them alive. And you shall take to yourself of all food that is eaten, and gather it to you, and it will be food for you and for them.'

Two of 'every living thing of all flesh', male and female, were to be taken into the ark, of birds, animals and creeping things 'according to their kinds'. This can only refer to the creatures within Noah's vicinity as he could hardly go on a world-wide safari to search out unknown species such as kangaroos.

There is no suggestion that they came of their own accord. God is concerned to protect Noah's environment, and Noah collects up all those of which he is aware. This again acts as a warning that these superlative descriptions such as 'every living thing' have to be interpreted from Noah's point of view. Also food of every kind is to be taken in, and stored up, to serve as food for men and beasts.

6.22 'Noah did this, he did all that God commanded him'.

How much can be said in a small sentence. This verse covers a considerable number of years and includes the planning and building of the ark, the laying in of food and water, and all the preparations for what lay ahead, including the gathering of the living creatures that were to enter the ark, which must certainly have stretched his ingenuity somewhat. But the stress is on the fact that Noah obeyed God. This fact is stressed again and again (7.5, 9, 16). He proved himself righteous.

While he was no doubt discreet about how he went about it, such work could not have gone on totally unnoticed, and he was no doubt at first faced with much questioning and derision, and possibly antagonism, but later he was probably written off as a harmless crank not worthy of notice. Perhaps this was why he was left alone by the men of violence. However, he persevered because God had told him to do so, until at last the work was done. He proved himself worthy.

The Day Arrives (Genesis 7.1-5)

7.1 'And Yahweh said to Noah, "Come, both you and all your household into the ark, for I have seen you as righteous before me in this generation".'

We now see a reversion from Elohim to Yahweh because God is now dealing with Noah personally as one who is within His covenant and not primarily as Judge and Creator. The long period of activity required in 6.22 is over and the time has come for them to take refuge in the ark. Again the reason is stressed, it is because Noah is the only one of his generation to be acceptable to God through his faithfulness and his faith in God.

Now Yahweh gives more detailed instructions. In the previous verses He had stated that two of every kind of creature must enter the ark, so that their kinds might be preserved, for He was speaking as Elohim, the Creator, now He deals with the more practical element that it is necessary for more to be preserved of the 'clean' animals, and also of the 'clean' birds, which are both suitable for food and sacrificial offerings, for He is speaking as Yahweh, the covenant

God, ensuring the maintenance of worship and the preservation of His people. This was clearly necessary or else the family would be unable to offer sacrifices to God until there had been time for the clean animals and birds to breed sufficiently, nor would they have sufficient milk and food. Verse 3 almost certainly refers to clean birds rather than all birds, being a parallel with verse 2 in abbreviated form.

7.2 “You shall take seven and seven of every clean animal, male and female, and two of the animals that are not clean, male and female. Of the birds of the air also, seven and seven, male and female, to keep their kind alive on the earth.”

It is not certain whether seven and seven means ‘seven pairs’ or seven of each kind, although verse 7 suggests the former, but either way provision is made for sacrificial offerings and later possibly for food. Already it is clear that there are distinct types of animals and birds considered suitable for sacrifice and for eating.

Such distinctions would in fact be necessary from the beginnings of the cult, unless it was accepted that anything could be offered, so that this is not an indication of late authorship. Views on sacrifice were complicated and widespread from the earliest times. This instruction on clean animals and birds could be given at the last moment as they would be to hand. How the numbers were originally indicated we do not know. Possibly by a hand of fingers plus two extra which may have had a name for it (as we say ‘twelve’ - ‘two eleph’ = 2 extra on top of ten - see [‘The use of Numbers in the Ancient Near East and in Genesis’](#)).

7.3 “For there are only seven more days, and then I will cause it to rain on the earth for forty days and forty nights, and every living thing that I have made I will blot out from the face of the ground.”

The number of days given for getting all the living creatures aboard is seven, the number of divine perfection, God's perfect time. The world began in seven ‘days’, now preparations for its decease will also take ‘seven days’.

The ‘seven days’ may be literal, or they may indicate a God-given length of time, while not tying Noah down too strictly (compare the ‘seven-day journey’ which appears regularly in Genesis). As with Cain, so now the world are to be driven from the ‘face of the ground’, but this time with more finality, for they will be ‘blotted out’. The seven days was needed in order to get all the living things into the ark in readiness for the Flood, and it would seem to have taken up the whole time, for once they were in ‘on that very day’ the Flood came (v.11-13).

‘Forty days and forty nights’ will later be significant as a period when men of God wait on God at special moments in history (Moses - Exodus 24.18; 34.28; Deuteronomy 9.9, 18; Elijah - 1 Kings 19.8; and Jesus Himself - Matthew 4.2 and parallels). Perhaps that idea looks back to this time. The mention of both days and nights shows the intensity of the experience. It is unceasing. ‘Forty days’ had probably already begun to mean an unspecified period of a little over a month, as it certainly would later as a period of waiting for judgment (Ezekiel 4.6; Jonah 3.4) or as a more general period of waiting (Numbers 13.25; 1 Samuel 17.16 - both significant periods of waiting for Israel). So what God is saying here (and what He probably originally said before it was translated into numbers) is that it will rain for over a moon period of days and nights. But the mention of nights stresses the continuity of it.

‘I will cause it to rain -- I will blot out’. In chapter 2.5 when God was mentioned as ‘causing it to rain’ on the earth it was, by inference, to bring for man the means of survival. Now God will cause it to rain to bring judgment on man. Previously it had brought life. Now it will bring death.

Noah and His Family Enter the Ark (7.5 - 7.10)

This section is a real problem for those who seek to split up the narrative. In order to fit the theory it has to be split up into minute bits chosen quite arbitrarily to fit the theory. Yet in reality the section sits well together as a unity, incorporating in one whole many of the features that are supposed to identify the differing documents.

7.5 'And Noah did all that Yahweh had commanded him'.

This comment finalises the last section and introduces this one. Once again Noah's obedience is highlighted, contrasting him with the corruption among the remainder of mankind. In verses 1-4 Yahweh has given His instructions, now in verses 5-9 we have Noah's obedience in the fulfilling of those instructions.

7.6 'And Noah was six hundred years old when the cataclysm of waters was upon the earth.'

C H Gordon has shown that the appearance of such genealogical details in a story narrative are a feature of ancient records. The number six (hundred) which is three plus three may suggest that God in His goodness had allowed two complete periods to pass rather than one before allowing judgment to come.

7.7 'And Noah went in with his sons and his wife and his son's wives with him into the ark because of the waters of the cataclysm.'

There is as yet no rain, but in full obedience Noah and his sons carry out the task of entering the ark, a process which clearly took seven days with all the creatures to get aboard, and they take their wives with them. This links the sons in obedience with their father. It was as well they obeyed promptly. Although they were not to know it there would be more than rain in the cataclysm to come.

Notice the change of emphasis as regards the Flood. In 6.17 and 7.6 ('cataclysm of waters') the emphasis is on the cataclysm, God's judgment, which is by water, which will destroy the earth. Here and in verse 10 ('waters of the cataclysm') the emphasis is on Noah and his sons being saved from the waters of the cataclysm. They will endure the cataclysm but will be saved from the waters.

7.8-9 'Of clean animals and unclean animals, of birds and of everything that creeps on the ground, there went in two and two to Noah into the ark, male and female as God (Elohim) commanded Noah.'

The emphasis here is on the fact that the creatures were in pairs, both male and female, whether pairs of two or pairs of sevens, to stress God's determination to repopulate the earth. Previously it had been 'two of every sort', compared with 'two and two' here. Elohim is used in order to refer the reader back to God's command in 6.19 with verse 22. (Note however that it was as Yahweh that God referred to the distinction between clean and unclean (7.2) - thus both names are in use by the one writer).

7.10 'And after the seven days the waters of the cataclysmic flood were upon the earth.'

As God had declared, so it was. Once His time was fully completed, the waters of judgment came. 'After the seven days' refers back to 7.4.

The Flood (7.11-16)

7.11-12 'In the six hundredth year of Noah's life, in the second month, on the seventeenth day of the month, on the same day, were all the fountains of the great deep broken up, and the covered openings of heaven were opened, and the rain was upon the earth forty days and forty nights.'

Notice how precise is the statement which confirms that we have here a memory of an eventful day. Indeed, who, who was there, could forget that day? For on that day it all happened, and its date was remembered precisely.

The description confirms that there was more to it than rain. Waters flooded up as well as down. The seas rose as well as the rains falling. A huge tidal wave swept over the land to combine with the continual torrential rain from the heavens.

But there really is no justification for talking about fountains and windows as though they were intended to be taken literally. These people well knew that the rain came from the clouds, and that the seas had been there from the beginning. But huge amounts of water came flowing up as from giant springs, and water came down in torrents of which they had never seen the like, released they knew not how, for forty days and forty nights (see on verse 4), yet in a way that they knew it was controlled by God. Language failed in the attempt to describe the situation, so they had to turn to metaphor. But it was not intended to be 'a scientific description' or to be taken literally (we still say 'the rain came down in bucketfuls!'). They were not trying to describe the cosmos. Apart from a few learned men at a later time, no one even gave a thought to the mechanics of the world. They described what they saw, as best they could, in terms of everyday things in their everyday lives.

We do not know how the date was originally passed down, but the ancients worked on phases of the moon and the seasons of the year, and would certainly have had names for them, and possibly had names for each day in the moon cycle. When the account was written down the writer interpreted this as above.

7. 13-16 'On that very day Noah, and Shem, Ham, and Japheth, the three sons of Noah, and Noah's wife, and the three wives of his sons, entered the ark. They, and every animal after its kind, and all the cattle after their kind, and every creeping thing that creeps on the earth after its kind, and every bird after its kind, every bird of every sort, went into the ark to Noah, two and two of all flesh in which is the breath of life. And they that went in, went in male and female of all flesh, as Elohim commanded him, and Yahweh shut him in.'

The reason for this repetition, which as we have seen is characteristic of ancient narratives and was especially appreciated by the listeners (compare nursery stories today), is to stress the exact obedience of Noah to the command of Elohim in 6.19-20, and to indicate the perfect timing of God.

Noah had been told to commence entry into the ark seven days previously (7.1) but it is clear that the task took the whole seven days allotted so that it was finally completed on the very day the Flood came, and on that day the final creature entered the ark, and Noah and his family went in for the last time.

So in 6.19-20 we have the Creator's command to take creatures of all kinds into the ark, in 7.2-3 we have the command from God as the covenant God to take in seven and seven of clean creatures, in 7.7-9 we have the obedience to this command but shown as included in the fulfilment of the total command which is brief in summary form, and in 7.14-16 we have the final declaration of the fulfilment of the Creator's plan in detail which ties in with the original command. This continual repetition stresses that these, and only these, survive the catastrophe and that the plan is to replenish the earth. The danger with such a cataclysm was that attention

might be on the dreadful flood, but the continual repetition ensures that the listener is kept very much aware of the survivors. As every good teacher knows, repetition of what is important aids the memory of his hearers.

Then 'Yahweh shut him in'. Note the change from Elohim to Yahweh. He has entered with all living things at the command of God the Creator (the wording re the living creatures 'after their kinds' also echoes Genesis 1) but now it is Yahweh who shuts him in. Thus God, the covenant God, tenderly ensures the safety of His servant. The thought is not that Noah left the blocking of the gap to God, but that God Himself ensured that what Noah had done was strong enough and safe enough for the ordeal ahead. In the end their security depended not on what Noah had done, but on the faithfulness of God, Who would watch over them in what was to come. They were safe because they were safe in His hands.

EXCURSUS.

The Flood has been thought of in terms of the ending of the ice age when sea levels would rise dramatically and the skies would be filled with dense vapour, and all kinds of catastrophic events could have arisen depending on the land levels of the world at the time, but it could equally have been caused by an asteroid striking the seas and causing an unprecedented calamity, including vast clouds and huge tidal waves. However, in the end we have to accept the fact that we can have no final and specific explanation, for we do not know when it occurred, nor can we know what conditions were like at the time.

The Flood in fact lasts what was probably twelve moon cycles (a year) and ten days (8.14), roughly 354 days. Its exact length would depend on the number of days to the each moon cycle over that period. The sequence in the narrative is as follows:

- 1). Flood commences - 17th day of the second month
- 2). Ark rests on Mount Ararat - 17th day of seventh month. There are 5 moon cycles from second to seventh month which times thirty using a recognised 'standard 30 day method' of indicating days of a 'month', would equal 150 days, the period not to be taken literally ('150 days' is thus really a technical way of translating 'five moon cycles' which is what the original possibly said. Moon cycles would actually be for 28/29 days thus the period in our terminology would be about 140 - 145 days). As has been previously suggested five may be the number of covenant (later the 'commandments' will be given in two sets of five), or if not it is a number representing completeness.
- 3). Waters have abated and tops of mountains seen - 1st day of tenth month
- 4). Waters have receded from land which can now be seen as 'dry' because no longer covered by water - 1st day of first month. This is five and a half moon cycles after the seventh month. This is possibly the second '150 days' (8.3), meaning five moon cycles (thus ignoring the part cycle). The whole period in our terminology would be about 155 - 160 days (140 - 145 + the extra fifteen days). With 2). this makes about 300 real days. This last 150 days includes the forty days of waiting (8.6) as the first 150 days had included the forty days of rain, and also includes the sending out of the birds.
- 5). The land, being 'dry land' again because it has come out of the sea (compare 1.9), now dries out thoroughly until on 27th day of second month it is again fit for use. (END OF EXCURSUS).

Description of the Flood at Its Height (Genesis 7.17)

7.17 'And the cataclysmic flood was forty days on the earth (land).'

We notice that it does not just say rain as in verse 10. While there was torrential rain there were also the huge tidal waves sweeping over the land.

7.18-20 'And the waters grew deeper and bore up the ark and it was lifted up above the earth. And the waters prevailed and increased with great abundance on the earth, and the ark went up on the face of the waters, and the waters prevailed in great abundance, and all the high mountains (or hills) that were under the whole heavens were covered. Fifteen cubits upwards did the waters prevail and the mountains were covered.'

This is a masterpiece of build up about the Flood. 'The waters grew deeper --- the waters prevailed and increased with great abundance --- the waters prevailed in great abundance and all the high mountains (or hills) under the whole heavens were covered'. This is repetition with a purpose. Each step is an increase on the previous one as the listeners and readers are gripped by the expanding cataclysm. Furthermore we even see the gradual movement of the ark, as it is first lifted from the ground, then borne up on 'the face of the waters' which have replaced the 'face of the ground'. Then finally we have the fact that all the high mountains (or hills) are under water. The listeners and readers are carried along step by step with growing involvement. (One problem with the verse divisions is that we read them one by one rather than as a whole narrative).

The 'high mountains' (or hills) that are covered are of course specifically those in Noah's vicinity. (For the meaning of 'under the whole heavens' compare Deuteronomy 2.25). As far as the eye can see there is nothing but water, and when he makes his checks the ark clears whatever mountains they pass by over 15 cubits (7 metres). Alternately it could be that the ark required 15 cubits clearance. (Being thirty cubits deep it would require fifteen cubit clearance if it were rectangular).

7.21-23 'And all flesh died that moved on the earth, birds, cattle, wild animals and every creeping thing that crept on the earth, and every man, all in whose nostrils was the breath of the spirit of life, all that was on the dry land, died. And every living thing that was on the face of the ground was blotted out both man and cattle and creeping thing and bird of the heavens, they were blotted out from the earth, and only Noah was left, and those who were with him in the ark.'

Thus the writer stresses in detail in terms of what he has previously said - 'all flesh died' (6.13, 17), 'all in whose nostrils was the breath of the spirit of life' (6.17), 'every living thing that was on the face of the ground was blotted out' (6.7; 7.4). His repetition demonstrates the fulfilment of God's every threat. Noah's world would have to begin anew.

7.24 ' And the waters prevailed on the earth (land) one hundred and fifty days.'

For five moon cycles there was no let up. The rain may now not be quite so severe and continuous, the tidal waves may now sweep in in lesser measure, but the waters did not begin to decrease. The new moon came and went, and came again, but the Flood continued in its intensity. How carefully they must have watched the moon through its cycle again and again, until it must have seemed that the cataclysm would never end, for there was no lowering of the level of the water. And then God's time came.

The Creator Remembers His Creatures (8.1- 3)

8.1- 3 'And God (Elohim the Creator) remembered Noah and every living thing, and all the cattle that were with him in the ark, and God made a wind blow over the earth, and the waters began to subside. The fountains also of the deep, and the openings in the heavens were stopped, and the rain from the heavens was restrained, and the waters receded continually from the earth, and after one hundred and fifty days the waters had subsided.'

God, the Creator, 'remembered' His creatures. This is the author's vivid way of stating that God stepped in to act, and it was as Elohim that He acted in order to preserve His creation. He had not of course actually forgotten them, for He was in control of the whole event, and He had Himself ensured that they would be safe throughout the voyage.

It is noteworthy that the author makes the action indirect. He does not say 'God blew' but that He caused a wind to blow. (Incidentally this seems to confirm that Genesis 1.2 is correctly translated 'Spirit' of God, otherwise the author would also here have said 'wind of God'. There is a difference between His direct action and His indirect action). But as well as the wind blowing the actions of the seas also ceased, and the torrential rains subsided, and the waters thus began noticeably to drop, and this went on for one hundred and fifty days (five moon cycles), thus paralleling the period when the waters prevailed. Note that 8.2 is a parallel reversal of 7.11-12.

Note that verses 1 - 3 are a summary of events, and will now be followed up with some of the detail. Now we are to learn some of the things that happened during the one hundred and fifty days of the receding of the waters, including the touching down of the ark, the first sighting of the tops of the mountains, and the further wait before Noah felt it might be time to act.

(The question arises as to whether the one hundred and fifty days mentioned here is the same as that mentioned in 7.24. It would appear to us that it is indeed a second period of one hundred and fifty days during which the floods continually abated, commencing with the touching down on the mountains of Ararat and finishing when the earth was again 'dry land'. However the question is not of primary importance).

Stages of Deliverance (8.4-14)

8.4 'On the seventh month, on the seventeenth day of the month, the ark came to rest on the mountains (or hills) of Ararat, and the waters continued going down until the tenth month, and in the tenth month on the first day of the month the tops of the mountains (or hills) were seen.'

Notice the exact reverse parallel with 7.18a-19. There 'the ark went on the face of the waters, and the waters prevailed exceedingly upon the earth and all the high mountains under the whole heaven were covered'. This demonstrates the careful construction of the whole account.

During the second one hundred and fifty days, while the waters were receding, the first noteworthy event was when they felt the ark come to rest on a mountain among the mountains or hills of Ararat (not specifically, be it noted, on Mount Ararat), and it was in the 'seventh' moon cycle. They must have seen this as God's perfect timing for seven is the number of divine perfection and completeness. This would have been at the beginning of the second one hundred and fifty days.

Can you imagine the tremendous sense of relief when 'dry land' was again encountered even though the waters prevailed and it was still submerged under the waters? But there was still some way to go, and the subsiding of the waters continued, until the tops of the mountains were actually seen, and that was on the first day of the tenth moon cycle. One can almost see Noah marking off events as they happened. The fact that it took two and a half months for the drop in water level to reveal the tops of the mountains/hills after the first coming to rest on a mountain/hill demonstrates that the total water level could not be too extreme given the time range for its subsidence. This is not, however, to deny that at one stage it was much deeper due to the tidal wave effect.

Whether we can correctly identify these 'mountains' is open to doubt, and it is even more doubtful whether we could hope to find the ark, or even know that it was the ark if we found it. As we have pointed out this was not Mount Ararat but mountains or hills within 'Ararat'. This may have been Urartu, but while the later Ararat (2 Kings 19.37; Jeremiah 51.27) is almost certainly Urartu, Urartu is not witnessed until late 2nd millennium BC and would therefore be doubtful here unless there had been a scribal updating. This is quite possibly a different 'Ararat'.

The cataclysmic Flood had continued to its highest point in five moon cycles, and now through a further five moon cycles (one hundred and fifty days) it decreases to a point where the ark is on 'dry land' and the tops of the mountains are visible, and during which Noah waits patiently for 'forty days' (just over a moon cycle), and then sends out birds to scout the land. It must have seemed significant that it was in the seventh moon cycle that the ark struck dry land. Here was an indication of the divine perfection of the work of God. But we note that the author does not try to twist the facts to meet his criteria. His dating shows that the periods of 'one hundred and fifty days' were not of the same exact length (see Excursus after 7.16). This smacks of genuineness.

8.6-9 'And after forty days Noah opened up the opening he had made in the ark and sent out a raven, and it went about to and fro until the waters had dried up from the earth. And he sent out a dove to see if the waters had abated from the face of the ground, but the dove found nowhere to land and returned to the ark, for the waters were covering the face of the whole earth (land). And he put out his hand and took her and brought her in to him into the ark.'

Only the tops of the mountains were visible at the end of verse 5 so Noah waits just over one more moon cycle ('forty days' - see on 7.3), and then decides to act.

And how descriptive the next words are. It is clear that Noah still sees waters all around so that he has to open up the opening at the top to release first a raven and then a dove so that he can find out what is happening in the wider world outside, on 'the face of the ground', the cultivated areas. This sounds like a memory of those moments passed down through history, and similar events respecting the sending out of birds are mentioned in Mesopotamian mythology. This was something never to be forgotten. The raven does not return, but the dove returns, and this satisfies Noah that the waters still prevail.

We note that no timing is given for these particular events. The author has his pattern of 7 - 40 - 150 - 150 - 40 - 7 to adhere to. The symmetry is not perfect as the last seven days is part of the second '150 days' whereas the first was apparently not part of the first, but this would not really concern the author, and indeed he may have considered the first '150 days' commenced at the start of the seven days. Thus he sees these flights as taking place over an unidentified period. The ancients had no problem with 'manipulating' numbers in order to get over their message. Numbers were adjectives with which to illustrate, not important in themselves, and not used with our modern penchant for mathematical exactness, and it is almost certain that to his readers and listeners these numbers had great significance. Now with seven days to go to the great event he again introduces numbers.

8.10 - 11 'And he waited another seven days and again sent the dove from the ark, and the dove came back in the evening and lo, in its mouth was a plucked off olive leaf. So Noah knew that the waters had abated from the earth.'

This seven day period parallels the opening seven day period and introduces the moment when Noah knows again that all is well. Again seven indicates the divinely perfect time.

The fresh olive leaf was a sign that the earth was once again fruitful. However he is too wise to try to leave the ark immediately. The earth may be 'dry' but it is still very wet and would not be suitable to be trodden on for some time. ('Another seven days' does not necessarily mean there had been a previous 'seven day' period. It simply refers to a fixed time period after a previous period whether fixed or not. Thus I could say 'I worked for a number of days, then I did this, then I worked for another seven days. This would not necessarily mean that the first period was one of seven days).

8.12 'And he waited a further seven days and sent out the dove, and she did not return to him again any more.'

This was final confirmation that all was well and they now simply had to wait for God to instruct them that they could safely leave the ark. The mention of a further seven days, which spoils the balanced cycle, may well have been deliberate. The two sevens together emphasise the divine completeness of the new world, the added seven giving additional stress.

8.13 'And in the six hundred and first year, in the first month, on the first day of the month, the waters were dried up from the earth and Noah removed the covering of the ark and looked, and behold the face of the ground was dried (chareb).'

Now Noah permanently removes the covering over 'the opening' for the last time and looks out (we know of no other 'covering' in the ark), and he sees for himself that the waters have gone and the cultivated areas must be dry. But he can also see how boggy the ground is and how impossible it will be to release on to it all the animals in the ark, so he patiently waits for God's further command.

8.14 'And in the second month, on the twenty seventh day of the month the earth was (fully) dry (yabesh).'

Far from being a contradiction to the previous verse, this is just common sense. The first dryness was because the waters had gone (compare in 1.9 how 'dry' land appeared out of water), this further dryness is because the ground is now fit to walk on. At last their refuge is no longer needed. (Compare Job 14.11 and Jeremiah 50.38 where chareb results in yabesh).

God the Creator Tells Those Who are in the Ark That All Is Now Well (8.15-19)

8.15-17 'And God spoke to Noah saying, "Go out from the ark, you, and your wife, and your sons and your sons' wives with you. Bring out with you every living thing of all flesh that is with you, both bird and domesticated animal, and every creeping thing that creeps on the earth, so that they may breed abundantly on the earth, and be fruitful, and multiply on the earth".'

At last the cataclysm is over and they can leave their refuge. Here God gives Noah His preliminary confirmation, which will be more solemnly enacted later, of His purpose for the world. This word of encouragement is nicely timed. The feelings of those who are in the ark are impossible to gauge. They have just experienced the destruction of their world and now they must face what appears to be an uncertain future. So God immediately confirms that there is a future. The earth is to begin again in the same way as before.

8.18-19 'So Noah went out, and his sons and his wife and his sons' wives with him, every animal, every creeping thing and every bird, whatever moves on the earth (land), after

their families, went out of the ark.'

Notice the repetitiveness even within two sentences. Repetitiveness is a feature of the whole narrative to encourage audience participation and memory. As always Noah obeys God and does exactly what He says.

Noah Offers a Sacrifice to Yahweh and Receives His Personal Covenant (8.20-22)

Now we are approaching the covenants around which the whole account is based and was the reason why it was preserved so assiduously. The first is a personal covenant made in response to Noah's act of worship. And yet because he encapsulates the whole human race, the covenant is also with them. But it is represented as a personal thought of Yahweh, not as a fiat from God as Creator. It is something that will primarily benefit man not the whole of creation, and is linked with man's response in worship.

8.20 'And Noah built an altar to Yahweh and took of every clean animal and every clean bird, and offered burnt offerings on the altar.'

Now we see clearly why it was necessary for there to be more than two of every clean animal and bird. It gives Noah the opportunity to present to God his immediate gratitude and worship. It is quite possible that the family partook of at least some of the offerings. We must not read into these sacrifices the Mosaic restrictions. It was probably seen as including an element of sin offering as well as of dedication and thanksgiving.

8.21 'And Yahweh smelt the sweet savour, and Yahweh said in his heart, "I will not again curse the ground any more because of what man does, because the thoughts in man's heart are evil from his youth, nor will I again smite any more every living thing as I have done. While the earth remains, seedtime and harvest, cold and heat, summer and winter and day and night shall not cease".'

'Yahweh smelt the sweet savour'. This is an anthropomorphism indicating God's acceptance of the worship. It is acceptable to Him and pleases Him as a beautiful perfume would be acceptable to man, for it signifies to Him an obedient and responsive faith.

'Yahweh said in his heart'. This is not suggesting its secrecy but rather expressing the personal nature of the covenant, and distinguishing it from the major covenant to follow. This is Yahweh's personal response to Noah's faith and trust. It was clearly communicated to Noah as we have it in the account.

What God is promising is that He will no more take direct action against man because of sin. He is not reversing the curse, for the ground will still produce thorns and thistles. But He will not take this any further. Nor will He ever again wreak such devastation as He has done. He accepts that man is sinful from his youth, and that it is now a natural part of man.

Notice that He speaks of 'the thoughts in man's heart'. It is not just man's actions that are important to God, but primarily how he thinks. Many a good action disguises an evil thought. It is man who looks at the outward appearance, but God looks at the heart. There is also a contrast here between God's heart and man's heart. God's heart is merciful in spite of man's evil heart, for He recognises man's weakness.

'While the earth remains -----' In some ways this was the most important covenant as far as the listeners were concerned in their day to day lives, (although not as far as man was

concerned in the first light of what had happened). The promise of the perpetuating of the seasons was the guarantee of man's food supply and of the certainties of life, and it is seen as a direct response to man's submission and act of worship. So the relating of the account at sacred feasts was not only the celebration of the fact that no calamity would again destroy the world, it was also a celebration of the fact of God's covenant that the sources of production would be maintained and continue, and that life would go on, on a steady course.

God's Detailed Instruction to Noah and His Sons (9.1-7)

In this whole passage God is Elohim, the Creator, for He is as it were beginning again, and reinstating man as His representatives on earth. Here God includes Noah's sons in His instructions. This is different from 8.21 and previously, demonstrating that this is His official dealings with the whole of mankind. So God gives instructions to Noah, and to 'his sons with him'. These instructions are important. The destruction of man might have been seen as annulling his position as God's representative. Thus God as Creator renews the commission He first gave to man:

- 1). Man is commanded to be fruitful and repopulate the world (9.1 compare 1.28a)
- 2). Man is to have authority over creation (9.2 compare 1.28b)
- 3). Man is given the right to eat of the flesh of living creatures and of plants but not of their blood (9.3-4 compare and contrast 1.29)
- 4). Man's life is sacred because he is made in the image of God, and to take that life is to merit death (9.5-6)
- 5). The further command to repopulate the world (the double mention stressing that this is the vital instruction to which the others are secondary).

9.1 'And God (elohim) blessed Noah and his sons with him and said to them, "Be fruitful and multiply, and fill the earth." '

We note that now the sons of Noah are included in God's words for the first time. This is a step forward and demonstrates that God now sees them as part of what is to be. They share his relationship with, and responsibility before, God. They represent the whole of mankind.

God is here speaking as the Creator (elohim) as in chapter 1.28, and repeats the words there spoken to man. Again man is 'blessed'. He again has the seal of God's approval on him. Yet the females are excluded, unlike in Genesis 1. This was, of course, the result of the Fall and the subsequent subjection of the woman. So this is written with an awareness of the material found in Genesis 2 - 3.

9.2-5 'And the fear of you and the dread of you shall be on every animal on the earth and every bird of the air, along with everything with which creeps on the ground, and all the fishes of the sea, all are delivered into your hand. Every moving thing that lives shall be food for you, and as I gave you the green plants, I give you everything. But you shall not eat the flesh with its life, that is, its blood.'

Man's authority over the animals is again stressed and he is now given express permission to eat them as food. This is almost certainly a confirmation of what man has already been doing as we have seen.

But one thing is forbidden, the eating of the blood. That is because the blood is the life. Man must recognise that what he eats, he eats as a gift from God. But he must still recognise God's overlordship. Part therefore is forbidden him, the part that symbolises the life God gave them, the life which He created on top of the initial creation, which

belongs to God. The blood replaces the tree of knowing good and evil as the test of man's obedience. He is not to eat the blood, whether it is in order to try to absorb the soul of the animal or its 'power', to share in its life, or simply through careless disregard. Rather the animal's flesh alone is to be for food.

Here God is stressing that man and animal are distinct. They are not to be intermingled. Man is not like the beast, he is different, for he shares the nature of the heavenly. Thus he should look to Heaven for his 'power' and for his 'life'. Properly observed this prohibition against eating the blood would have saved mankind from many diseases.

9.6 'For your lifeblood I will surely require a reckoning, of every creature I will require it, and at the hand of every man, and at the hand of every man's brother I will require it. Whoever sheds man's blood, by man shall his blood be shed, for God made man in his own image.'

Man stands on earth as God's representative and shares something of the heavenly, therefore to take man's life is to rebel against the Creator. Whoever therefore takes that life shall have his own life forfeit. Man's life is sacred to God.

The reference to every man's brother has in mind Cain and Abel, and the thought there that every man is his 'brother's' guardian. This sacredness again stresses the distinction between man and animal on the very grounds that man is made in the image of the heavenly. But the forfeiture of the murderer's life is, under God, in the hands of man. Here then God is stressing again man's sovereignty over the world He has given him. It is man who must carry out this jurisdiction. Man must take responsibility to act as judge under God's instruction. It is an awesome task that He requires of man.

9.7 'And as for you, be fruitful and multiply, bring forth abundantly on the earth and multiply in it.'

This repeats the charge in verse 1 in order to stress its importance. Man has the responsibility and privilege of peopling the earth so that he can carry out his task of controlling and watching over it, and this is his first responsibility.

God's Covenant with Man and with All Living Creatures (9.8-17)

Now we come to the primary covenant around which the whole history is written. This covenant, made with Noah and his sons, is distinctive. It is not a covenant of relationship but of direct fiat from God. It is not dependent on any response from man, which is why it is given by God as Creator (Elohim) and not as Yahweh.

The covenant was important to man's sense of security. The Flood had demonstrated what could happen to the world and without this covenant man would henceforth live in fear of a repetition. Every gathering of clouds, every storm at sea, would be seen as a portent. Thus God gives man the assurance that he need not fear. God will not allow it to happen again. He will keep the elements in bounds.

9.8 'And God spoke to Noah, and his sons with him.'

Only since the Flood has this stress been laid on the inclusion of the sons. There is now joint responsibility. All mankind is included in the covenant, as are the living creatures. Notice, however, that although the covenant is with all creation it is communicated to Noah and his sons. They stand in the place of God for His creation.

9.9-10 'Saying, "I, behold I, establish my covenant with you and with your descendants after you, and with every living creature that is with you, the birds, the domesticated animals, the wild creatures, those who are with you, as many as came out of the ark, even every creature of the earth (land)".'

Note how all creatures are included in the covenant. This is the covenant of the Creator with His creation. It is thus not dependent on man's obedience. It is absolute.

9.11 'And I establish my covenant with you that never again shall all flesh be cut off by the waters of a cataclysm, nor shall there ever again be a cataclysm to destroy the earth.'

God gives His guarantee that never again will there be a cataclysm of such devastating proportions. The repetition of 'I establish My covenant' is a double guarantee, a double confirmation for the purpose of stress, as well as a means of reinforcing the words to a listener.

9.12-16 'And God said, "This is the sign of the covenant that I make between me and you and every living creature that is with you through all future generations. I do set my bow in the cloud, and it shall be as a sign of a covenant between me and the earth. And it shall be that when I bring a cloud over the earth, the bow will be seen in the cloud, and I will remember my covenant which is between me and you and every living creature of all flesh, and the waters shall no more become a cataclysm to destroy all flesh, and the bow will be in the cloud, and I will consider it that I may remember the everlasting covenant between God and every living creature of all flesh that is on the earth".'

God takes a natural phenomenon and turns it into a sign. 'I do set my bow in the cloud'. The word for 'bow' is the same as later used for a 'war bow'. Are we to see in this a suggestion that God is ceasing His adversarial position? That He has magnanimously 'laid down His arms'? Every time man sees the rainbow he will recognise that God has 'put down His bow'.

The use of the rainbow as a sign does not mean that it has never appeared before, only that it is being given a new significance. Thus every rainbow will be a reminder of God's covenant. 'I will remember --'. It is not of course that there is any danger that God would forget. It is man who will see the bow in the clouds and will be assured that God will 'remember' His covenant. Note that the bow is mentioned three times. This is a guarantee of the completeness of the protection it provides.

And the guarantee is that never again will such a flood come on the earth. Never again need they fear inundations of water of such magnitude. It has been a once for all occurrence.

'The everlasting covenant'. This covenant is permanent and unchangeable. It is for ever.

9.17 'And God said to Noah, "This is the sign of the covenant which I have established between me and all flesh that is on earth."

This final repetition sums up the whole and gives final confirmation to the hearers of the sign and its significance. It is God's unconditional guarantee.

This no doubt is where the original account ended in its use at the feast for which it was considered appropriate when it would be recited as a 'reminder' to God of His covenant. It is followed by a further covenant history which was probably tacked on, as also applying to the sons of Noah, when the tablet on which the two accounts is found was

written, with the purpose of leading on to the next account, the spread of the nations. It is quite remarkable how the compiler has gathered together disparate covenant records and combined them into one united whole, each leading on to the next.

9.18 'And the sons of Noah that went out from the ark were Shem, Ham and Japheth, and Ham became the father of Canaan. These three were the sons of Noah and of these three was the world populated.'

These sentences are preparing for the next sections. Firstly they are explaining that Ham has produced a son called Canaan (see next section) and secondly they are preparing for chapter 10, the table of nations. From the sons of Noah, the writer emphasises, the known world was populated. Thus extensive was the Flood and its effects.

9.20 'Noah, a man of the soil (ish ha adamah), began and planted vineyard.'

There is possibly a reference here back to words of Lamech at Noah's birth (5.29). The man who came from the adamah, which had been cursed, now from that adamah produces a source of comfort for man. Compare Psalm 104.15 where wine is described as gladdening men's hearts.

But sadly the tale of woe continues, for Noah misuses that which God has given. To suggest that this is inconsistent with the earlier picture of the 'perfect man' is true, but this brings out not that the two are contradictory, but that even the best of men can fall into temptation and sin. The horror with which Noah views his fall and its consequences comes out in his final words.

9.21 'And he drank of the wine and became drunk, and was uncovered within his tent.'

In a drunken state Noah lies naked in his tent, unaware of the impropriety of his situation. In his right mind he would never have done this for he knew men might enter the tent, and to be seen naked was a shameful thing ever since man's first sin. There may be a suggestion in this that Noah once more reveals sinful man's 'nakedness' by his weakness in misusing the wine, another sign of disobedience to God. And there is certainly a warning here of what carelessness with wine can do even to the 'perfect' man.

9.22 'And Ham, the father of Canaan, saw his father's nakedness, and told his brothers outside.'

The continual stress on Ham as the father of Canaan shows that by this time Canaan has been born. This event is thus some time after the end of the Flood. The phrase 'saw his father's nakedness' may be a euphemism for something worse, and this may be the first recorded homosexual act (see v.24). This would certainly help to explain the seriousness of the punishment. However the difference in attitude between Ham and his brothers is also drawn out. Ham was not to blame for finding his father naked, but he was to blame for not being discreet and dealing quietly with the situation. Instead he made a big thing of it. There was clearly something very unpleasant about his behaviour.

9.23 'And Shem and Japheth took a robe (shimlah - which acted as a blanket at night and a robe during the day - see Exodus 22.26) and laid it over their shoulders, and went in backwards and covered their father's nakedness, and their faces were backwards and they did not look on their father's nakedness.'

In contrast to Ham, Shem and Japheth act with consideration towards their drunken father and preserve his dignity, thus also avoiding any unpleasant thoughts that might

arise. This is a good example of the importance of taking steps to avoid temptation.

9.24 'And Noah awoke from his wine and knew what his youngest son had done to him.'

After Noah's careless abandon he has to face the unpleasant consequences. This is always the case with sin. It is quite clear that whatever Ham had done was looked on with the utmost seriousness.

'Had done to him'. It was not the discovery of his father's condition which was his sin, but his consequent behaviour. We note that Ham is said to be his youngest son. Thus the order in which sons are given is not necessarily that of seniority. See 10.21 which also suggests that Japheth was the second oldest.

9.25 'And he said, "cursed be Canaan . A servant of servants shall he be to his brothers".'

It is possible that Noah kept what Ham had done in his heart and that this series of curse and blessing was given some time after the event, possibly even on Noah's death bed. Thus Ham may by then have died and this would explain why the curse is levelled at Canaan. Alternately it may be that Noah wanted Ham to see the consequences he had brought, not only on himself but on his children. Perhaps he saw something in Canaan he did not like, inherited from his father, and knew what the consequences would be for Canaan's children with regard to their future sexual behaviour. Certainly the Canaanites would later be renowned for their sexual depravity. Curses and blessings were thought to have a powerful effect on the lives of descendants, especially when given on the deathbed. Ham was to be punished through the consequences which resulted to his son who would be 'a servant of servants', the lowest of the low.

9.26 'Blessed be Yahweh, the God of Shem, and let Canaan be his servant.'

This is an unusual phrase as we expect to read 'blessed be Shem'. It arises from the fact that Noah sees the greatness of the blessing that is to be Shem's and is consequently filled with wonder and praise to Yahweh. The purpose is to draw out that Shem is to be blessed because of his relationship to Yahweh rather than just because of his own status. Shem's descendants will be especially blessed, they will include the race through which God's revelation will come to men. But this will be of God's unmerited favour and goodness, and beyond anything that Shem deserves. (Compare Genesis 24.27 where a blessing on Yahweh includes a blessing on the servant of Yahweh).

9.27 'God enlarge (yaphth) Japheth and let him dwell in the tents of Shem, and let Canaan be his servant.'

The word 'enlarge' is a play on Japheth's name. In 1 Chronicles 5.10 'dwell in the tents of' suggests being subjugated. However here it more probably refers to them receiving benefits from 'Shem'. The 'enlargement' suggests blessing but also looks forward to the increase of the nations in the next chapter, which is of course part of that blessing.

Note that Canaan is to be servant to both. His servitude is mentioned three times to stress its completeness. But it must not be overlooked that the curse is primarily on Canaan's descendants and not on Ham's. Ham's would themselves become great nations. These ideas have been widely distorted to defend an indefensible racism.

We note again how the divine names are used. In blessing Shem He is Yahweh. In blessing Japheth He is Elohim. The descendants of Shem are to be the people of the

covenant.

Ham receives no blessing. All that is offered to him is the curse on Canaan. In this there is both mercy - the curse is limited - and judgment - he is excluded from the blessings. Noah could never forget what Ham had done to him.

9.28-29 'And after the flood Noah lived 350 years . All the days of Noah were 950 years, and he died.'

This directly connects back with chapter 5 showing the unity of the whole section. The separate covenants have been deftly combined into one whole. It is possible that 'three hundred years and fifty years' was intended to depict a full life (three is the number of completeness) and a life of faithfulness to the covenant (five is the number of covenant). To the early readers and hearers numbers were full of significance.

10.1a 'This is the history of the sons of Noah.'

The writer intends us to know the original source of his material, passed down orally through many feasts and finally put into writing we know not when or by whom, but we can be sure that it was very early on, well before the time of Moses who undoubtedly made use of these records.