

May 30, 2010

GO FORTH

Jeffery D. Woodhams

I'd like to take a moment to thank our veterans for their faithful service to our country, and for giving my children the opportunity to grow up in this great land. I hope that you all have an opportunity to celebrate this important holiday with those you love. Memorial Day is a day for us to reflect on the sacrifices of those who fought, bled and died to maintain freedom in this world. It is a day set aside so that we will not forget that freedom is not free.

How do you celebrate Memorial Day? Maybe you go to a parade, visit a cemetery, or have a picnic with your family. This year there's a new option: a late-season snowfall in California is allowing at least one resort to advertise one last chance to go skiing this weekend!¹

Did you know that God has given us a memorial as well? The purpose is different, and the time and place are varied. God's memorial is not bound to one nation or one people, but it a memorial for all men of all times and of all nations. We are almost at the point that we can talk about God's memorial; we'll probably get to it next week.

For today, let's pick up where we left off last week. Let's read Genesis 8:13 to start.

Genesis 8:13-14:

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.

And in the second month, on the seven and twentieth day of the month, was the earth dried.

In verse 13, we pick up the story one month after verse 12, in which the dove Noah released did not return. The ground and vegetation were suitable for a dove at that point, but still not ready for heavy animals and man. After a month had gone by, Noah wanted to get a better view. Perhaps removing the "covering" meant altering the structure, sort of like breaking a hole in the roof. I don't know. If it had been some sort of little hatch it doesn't seem like he would have waited a whole month for a peek. I'm guessing the roof was secure and had to be partially dismantled. In that context, if you were Noah, would you really want to be destroying part of your boat too early? I mean, what if the flooding starts up again? Noah waited.

When he had his look, he must have seen a rather dismal landscape. The water had receded, but the ground was still wet. The date given for the earth being dried is nearly two months after his first peek! Nevertheless, the ground did dry, with young trees and vegetation gaining greater foothold as time passed. How would Noah know for sure when it was safe to leave the ark? Talk about cabin fever! They'd been in there for a little over a year by this point. But think of the responsibility Noah bears: the survivors in the ark are all that is left of the land dwelling animals and people. Letting them out too

¹ Henry K. Lee, "Just the Thing for Memorial Day - Skiing." *San Francisco Chronicle* (26 May 2010). Available at <http://www.sfgate.com/cgi-bin/article.cgi?f=/c/a/2010/05/25/BABV1DK6CM.DTL>

soon could destroy the future of many, many species. If you were Noah, would you really want to have an “*Oops!* moment” here? No way! Noah, a man of faith, waited upon the Lord’s timing.

And God spake unto Noah, saying,

Go forth of the ark, thou, and thy wife, and thy sons, and thy sons’ wives with thee.

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.

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

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

When the time was right, God spoke. “Go forth,” said God, “Go forth.” Just as God had told him to *come* into the ark, God now tells him to *go forth* from the ark. Where is God? *Right there in the ark!* Once again, Noah responded in faith. Noah is to bring life into a devastated world. Noah obeyed, and that obedience is called *faith!*

And so the remnant spared from the old world steps into a new world. The ark is a tiny bridge between the world that was and the world that is. What a vast change! The immense forests of God’s original creation are destroyed. Some of that vegetation will become vast petroleum deposits, some will become coal, and yet other vegetation is strewn about the lands and seas.² Plants and animals destroyed by the Flood are buried in layers of mud all over the world. We know from their remains that the world Noah stepped into was very, very different from the the world he had stepped away from upon entering the ark. The descendants of most vegetation and animals destroyed and buried have never gained the size of their pre-Flood ancestors. For example, a fossilized dragonfly has been found with a wingspan of two and a half to three feet!³ The largest we have now are about eight inches across, which would still seem big to me.

This also answers the question, “Where is the Garden of Eden?” The History Channel and other media resources have aired programs about people trying to find the Garden of Eden, but guess what? If you believe Scripture, then you will realize that the Garden of Eden was totally washed away; and if you don’t believe Scripture, why would you even try to find the Garden of Eden in the first place? Two of the rivers in modern Iraq are named after rivers that flowed through that garden, but think about it this way: how many places in the New World were named after places from the Old World during the Age of Exploration? Many, many places, obviously. Has anyone here ever driven through Paris? How about Paris, *Tennessee*? We shouldn’t be surprised to find that two rivers in the postdiluvian world were given antediluvian names.

The point is that the world has changed drastically. There are very, very few places on earth today, perhaps no places, that are as productive and vital as those that existed before the Flood. It is into this new world that Noah bravely steps.

2 For a sensible explanation of oil and coal formation, see Andrew Snelling, “The Origin of Oil,” December 27, 2006. Available at <http://www.answersingenesis.org/articles/am/v2/n1/origin-of-oil>.

3 *Meganeura monyi*.

By the way, if you were Noah, what would you do at this point? Would you start trying to salvage lumber to make housing? Maybe you'd start to disassemble the ark and take that treated lumber down the mountain. Maybe you'd scout for a pleasant place to live and raise livestock before anything else. Noah *did* start to build—but not for himself!

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.

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.

While the earth remaineth, seedtime and harvest, and cold and heat, and summer and winter, and day and night shall not cease.

Noah stepped off the ark, built an altar, and made a sacrifice to God, dedicating himself and his family to God's service in this new world. This sacrifice was made at a great cost to Noah! Fully one-seventh of all the clean animals—the useful livestock—were sacrificed to God when Noah entered this new world. That took great faith: the God who sustained him in the ark for a year would have to continue to sustain him afterward.

It's also a show of ownership. Everything in the world is now in Noah's hands; but Noah is acknowledging that everything he has, or ever will have, is God's.

But let us never forget that this is also a very sober moment. All that lived before had perished. There is no joy in the thought. We have a saying: "You can lead a horse to water, but you can't make him drink." Neither God nor Noah had attempted to force anyone onto the ark; but the ark was open to one and all. God allows man to make up his own mind.

Noah essentially said, "Before I do anything for my own benefit, before I do anything for my own comfort, I'm going to take the best of what I have and give it to God." Now *that's* faith!

Noah's sacrifice prompts a response from God: a two-fold promise. God promises that He will never again curse the ground because of man, and He promises that He will never again destroy everything worldwide "while the earth remaineth." The world is, of course, subject to localized problems, but it will never again be completely flooded with water.

Noah entered the ark, and was safe in God's keeping; now Noah has left the ark, and shows by his sacrifice that he still trusts in God's keeping. It is Noah's job to take life into a devastated world.

What a picture for us! Folks, I'm glad for everyone who has found salvation in Jesus Christ. Jesus is the ark of safety that will bear God's judgment for you. But the fact of the matter is that you have a job to do! We can't be content just to sit around and keep the good news to ourselves. We must carry life into a world that is lost and dying. We must plan and organize our lives in such a way that we are known in this world as people of integrity and love and a firm conviction of the truth. You have a new spirit—God's own Spirit—which is alive within you.

Let me share with you something that may sound totally crazy. Ready? *There are some things that dead*

men cannot do. Crazy, huh? The corollary is that there are some things that only living people can do. Now here is where we draw this together: The old world is dead to Noah, and Noah, for all practical purposes, is dead to it. Noah steps off the ark, bringing new life into a new world, and we are to do the same.

Let me read to you the first ten verses of Ephesians chapter 2:

And you hath he quickened [made alive], who were dead in trespasses and sins;

Wherein in time past ye walked according to the course of this world, according to the prince of the power of the air, the spirit that now worketh in the children of disobedience:

Among whom also we all had our conversation in times past in the lusts of our flesh, fulfilling the desires of the flesh and of the mind; and were by nature the children of wrath, even as others.

But God, who is rich in mercy, for his great love wherewith he loved us,

Even when we were dead in sins, hath quickened us together with Christ, (by grace ye are saved;)

And hath raised us up together, and made us sit together in heavenly places in Christ Jesus:

That in the ages to come he might shew the exceeding riches of his grace in his kindness toward us through Christ Jesus.

For by grace are ye saved through faith; and that not of yourselves: it is the gift of God:

Not of works, lest any man should boast.

For we are his workmanship, created in Christ Jesus unto good works, which God hath before ordained that we should walk in them.

This is amazing! God saved us and gave us new life so that we can take that life and produce goodness and good works. God didn't spare Noah so that he could just sit there in the ark for the rest of his days. No! God had something important and beneficial for him to do, just as He has something important and beneficial and good for you to do as well. You are his workmanship, created in Christ Jesus unto good works, which God has prepared for you to do.

Will you join God in the greatest work of all time—the work of taking life into a dead world?