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Sunday Reading.

NOAH'S FLOOD.



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NOAH'S FLOOD.

NOAH was a remarkable instance of a righteous man living in the midst of a wicked generation, and in giving his character and history, we are necessarily led into a description of the general state of mankind at the time in question.

Though the world, which is now about six thousand years old, had been created only about one thousand years at the time of Noah's birth, it was probably then very full of inhabitants, for as the life of the same man lasted often for eight or nine hundred years, many generations may be supposed to have flourished together. Adam himself was alive at the same time with Noah's father, and he died only a short time before the birth of Noah, so that our first forefather must have seen a very numerous, and (what was extremely distressing) a very depraved posterity.

He must have beheld his children's children corrupting one another, and making a rapid progress in iniquity.

As men began to multiply on the face of the earth, they became still more and more abandoned. It pleased God however to preserve a chosen seed in the family of Seth, from whom also the Saviour was to come, of which line of descendants it is said, that 'a blessing was in it.'

But did this peculiar seed all walk uprightly in the sight of God? Ah! how difficult is it to live unspotted from the world! Even these were infected with the general corruption; and it seems as if the want of separation between the professors of religion, and the open sinners, had hastened the destruction of the earth, for we read that 'the sons of God' (by which those who seemed to be of the true religion are very naturally supposed by many to have been intended) 'saw the daughters of men that they were fair, and took to them wives of all which they chose.' A general carelessness about the religious

religious character of those with whom the professors of religion intermarried, arising from an unrestrained affection for their persons, appears to be given as a reason why matters so soon came to that dreadful pass in which we are now to describe them. The few who retained the knowledge of God, probably discovered little zeal, and were scarcely to be distinguished from others, or at least men were strangely drawn aside into worldly compliances.

But while sin was thus advancing with rapid strides, did not God notice, or behold it? Yes; he often made himself known in those days by signs and judgments; 'My Spirit,' he also says, 'shall not always strive with man.' It appears then that the spirit of God strives even with the most profligate sinners; and in another place, the 'patience of God' is represented as 'well nigh wearied out in the days of Noah;' yet behold his long-suffering! Still he allows them a respite of an hundred and twenty years, during which period he waits upon them with offers of mercy. He warns before he

strikes, and thus proves that he 'willeth not
' the death of the sinner,' and that his de-
struction is of himself.

It is now said, that 'God saw that the
' wickedness of man was great in the
' earth, and that every imagination of the
' thoughts of his heart was only evil con-
' tinually.' Is not this description too
strong? Ought not some further evidence
of it to be given? My answer is, 'God
' saw it.' The men themselves no doubt
did not see it, and if we could suppose
them to have had historians of their own,
these, no doubt, would not have mentioned
it, but God's testimony is better than that
of a thousand witnesses.

Such then being the state of mankind,
who can wonder to hear the determination
of a holy God to destroy the earth with
its inhabitants, and to leave a monument
of his awful justice for the warning and
instruction of every age that was to fol-
low.

But are none exempted from this ge-
neral charge of iniquity? Yes, here is
an individual selected for our notice. It
is

is said that 'Noah found grace in the eyes of the Lord.' The most honourable testimony is given of him in scripture; he is said to have been 'a just man, and perfect in his generations;' which does not mean that he was without fault, for we read in another place of his being actually overtaken by sin, but that he was a sincere or complete and consistent character, uncorrupted by the wickedness that prevailed in his own time or generation. It is also said in another place that 'he walked with God,' he was mindful of him, accustomed to pray to him, regarding God in all he did; he was also zealous in his cause, for he was 'a preacher' as well as an example 'of righteousness;' and while the 'long-suffering of God' waited on the sinners around him, Noah was raised up for the special purpose of instructing and rebuking them, and warning them of their approaching destruction.

But while we admire his undaunted courage, let us ask ourselves whether we are equally courageous in the same cause, and while we commend Noah for renouncing and reprovng the works of darkness,

though licensed by general custom, whether we equally renounce and reprove the evils which are now commonly practised. If the fashion of the times will justify us, surely it might have justified Noah also.

But let us next speak of the period of the deluge, and of the favour shewn to this eminent person. God condescended to reveal to him the tremendous purpose of destroying all flesh by a flood of water, saying unto Noah, 'the end of all flesh is before me;' yet he enters into covenant with him, to save him and his little family from the general ruin.

The method of deliverance, with all the circumstances of it, was of divine appointment. The Lord himself directed Noah to prepare an ark of immense size, which might contain his household, and a small remnant of all other creatures, for the preservation of their different species. In this building the various animals, with sufficient provision for their support, were to ride in safety, while one common desolation swept away the inhabitants of the earth, with all its furniture.

Behold

Behold then the faith and obedience of Noah, for which he is mentioned as a bright example to all succeeding ages! An inspired writer has told us that 'he believed God.' 'By faith, Noah being warned of God of things not seen as yet, prepared an ark to the saving of his house, by the which he condemned the world, and became heir of the righteousness which is by faith.'

Methinks I see him with stedfast countenance and determined step, proceeding amidst the profane ridicule of surrounding multitudes, to prepare materials for the ark, and to engage workmen in this strange and arduous employment, while at the same time he reproves that wicked generation, warns them of their danger, and denounces, if they repent not, the approaching judgments of God upon them. Instead of respecting his faith, they smile at his credulity, and scornfully turn away from this venerable man of God. Year after year, however, he pursues his work. Year after year they taunt him with his folly, and amuse themselves in overlooking the vast building as it proceeds.

Surely, say they, he is a man of a gloomy imagination, of an absurd fancy, or of a disturbed brain; he is forward, troublesome, and censorious, always representing our conduct in the most wicked and abominable light: the world, they insist, is not so wicked as he pretends. Fathers and children join in deriding him. High and low, rich and poor, men and maidens, equally forgetful of God, and worldly and unbelieving, comfort each other that they are in the right, and that such a goodly multitude as they seem to make, cannot be altogether wicked, and exposed to one general judgment.

It is here worthy of observation, that the common order of the world does not seem to have been overthrown at the time of which we are speaking, for it is very possible for the frame of society to be held together, even when the irreligion and corruption of man is extremely great. It is true, indeed, we read 'that the earth was filled with violence,' for when the passions of men are not restrained by religion, much violence both in their language and conduct is apt to follow of course.

course. One great feature in their character appears however to be their being quite swallowed up by the pleasures and concerns of this life, for the scripture speaks of them at that time, as eating and drinking, and marrying, and being given in marriage, evidently implying, that their whole time and thoughts were engaged in those things, and that by the means of these they were led to forget God, and to neglect the warnings which were sent unto them.

Let us next view Noah entering into the ark, according to the commandment which God had given him: ' He, and his
' sons, and his sons wives, because of the
' waters of the flood; of beasts also, and
' of fowls, and of creeping things, there
' went in two and two, male and female,
' as God commanded Noah. And it came
' to pass after seven days, that the waters
' of the flood were upon the earth, and
' all the fountains of the great deep were
broken up, and the windows of heaven
were opened.'

But while we accompany Noah into the ark, let us turn our eyes to the multitudes who remained without, of whom no doubt he took his leave, with many painful sensations.

What a wonderful and tremendous scene! Oh! the lamentations and bitter cries of thousands now perishing by that very calamity, the kind notices of which they had refused to attend to, or had presumptuously derided. Many of Noah's dear relations were included in this number. What anguish must he have felt for them: but in vain! they had despised his warning, their day of grace was past, and he could afford them no relief.

And now the rain overflows the meadows, and the whole multitude seek, no doubt, the rising ground; but the waters increase upon them. A few probably reach the mountains, and they trust that, at least, the highest rocks on the mountain-tops shall save them; ' But the waters prevail exceedingly, and all the high hills that were under the whole heaven were covered. ' Fifteen cubits upward did the waters prevail,

6 vail, and the mountains were covered.
 6 And all flesh died that moved upon the
 6 earth, both of fowl, and of cattle, and of
 6 beast, and of every creeping thing that
 6 creepeth on the earth, and every man,
 6 and Noah only remained alive, and they
 6 that were with him in the ark.'

It is no unimportant remark, that the truth of this story of which we have thus given the plain scriptural account is confirmed by a variety of striking circumstances, not necessary here to be mentioned, and also by the several traditions of various and distant nations, differing indeed in their religion, but agreeing in their account of an ancient and general deluge.

And should we not feel terror for ourselves, while we contemplate these effects of the divine vengeance! Who can stand before this holy Lord God! We see here that the God who threatens will also execute his threatenings, and that though hand join in hand, the wicked shall not go unpunished.

But a pleasing prospect opens itself to
 righteous

righteous Noah, ' for God remembered No-
 ' ah and every living thing with him in the
 ' ark, and made a wind to pass over the
 ' earth, and the waters were assuaged, and
 ' the ark rested on the mountains of Ararat,
 ' and in the tenth month the first day of the
 ' month were the tops of the mountains seen.'
 Noah now sends forth a raven and after-
 wards a dove from the window of the ark,
 but ' the dove' as yet ' could find no rest
 ' for the sole of her foot and returned into
 ' the ark : ' and again ' after other seven days
 ' he sends forth the dove' again. ' And the
 ' dove came into him in the evening, and
 ' lo in her mouth was an olive leaf plucked
 ' off, so that Noah knew that the waters
 ' were abated from off the earth.' What a
 pleasing confidence would he now feel of
 his deliverance! Wherever indeed he turned
 his eyes he would see the devastation which
 sin had made, nor can he be supposed to
 have reflected without unutterable anguish
 on the multitudes that had perished in their
 iniquities, yet a sense of gratitude for his
 own wonderful escape seems to have over-
 powered him, and to have swallowed up for
 the time every other concern. He begins
 the new duties of the life which had been
 preserved

preserved to him by an act of solemn worship to his preserver.

“ Noah builded an altar unto the Lord
and took of every clean beast and offered
burnt offerings on the altar.”

Sacrifices no doubt had been originally appointed by God for the sake of shewing forth that great atonement which in due time was to be made through the sacrifice of Jesus Christ, “ that lamb of God which taketh away the sins of the world,” by whose blood, and not by the blood of bulls and goats, the iniquities of men were to be pardoned and the true worshippers were to be brought nigh to God.

And the Lord said, “ 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 living thing as I have
done. While the earth remaineth, seed
time and harvest, and cold and heat, and
summer and winter, and day and night
shall not cease.”

And

' And God said, I do set my bow in the
 ' cloud, and it shall be for a token of a
 ' covenant between me and the earth. And
 ' it shall come to pass, that when I bring a
 ' cloud over the earth, that the bow shall be
 ' seen in the cloud: and I will look upon
 ' it, that I may remember the everlasting
 ' covenant between God and every living
 ' creature of all flesh that is on the earth.'

Thus were the tokens of God's mercy
 given immediately after He had been display-
 ing his most awful vengeance, and if we are
 walking in the steps of Noah we may look
 on the rainbow, even to this day, with con-
 fidence and joy, because it is a sign of secu-
 rity not from a flood of waters only, but
 from all the effects of the wrath of God.
 It is spoken of in the book of Revelations
 as the peculiar emblem which surrounds
 our Saviour, for when he is described as
 ' sitting on his throne' it is said, ' there
 ' was a rainbow round about the throne,'
 implying that as God was true to his pro-
 mise made to Noah, both delivering him
 from a flood of waters and no more drown-
 ing the world for the sins of men, so also
 would he be true to that everlasting cove-
 nant

nant made through Jesus Christ, who is indeed the Saviour as he is promised in the Scripture, of those who put their trust in him.

And it is said in like manner in Isaiah, for the comfort of each individual who shall be found among God's faithful people, • For
 ' this is as the waters of Noah unto me, for
 ' as I have sworn that the waters of Noah
 ' should no more go over the earth, so have
 ' I sworn that I would not be wroth with
 ' thee. For the mountains shall depart and
 ' the hills be removed, but my kindness
 ' shall not depart from thee, neither shall the
 ' covenant of thy peace be removed saith
 ' the Lord that hath mercy on thee.'

I think we may reduce the whole instruction to be gained from this awful and affecting story to these two heads, I mean we may learn the "severity" of God on the one hand and his "goodness" on the other.

Men are not apt to believe that God will be true to his word, especially in respect to his
 threat-

threatenings against the wicked. They choose to conceive of Him as some easy being who, because he is merciful will either not punish at all, or will not punish severely, or at least will not extend his punishment to any great number of his creatures, and when the preachers of righteousness stand up like Noah, and declare in the very words of Scripture his eternal judgments on the wicked, multitudes are apt to think they will never come to pass, and they treat the preachers much as this wicked and unbelieving world treated Noah before them. But the history which has now been given shews that God is not the sort of being he is supposed to be, and affords a full answer to this dangerous delusion. ‘ For if God spared not the old world but saved Noah the eighth person a preacher of righteousness, bringing in the flood upon the world of the ungodly. And burning the cities of Sodom and Gomorrah into ashes, condemned them with an overthrow, making them an example unto those that after should live ungodly; The Lord knoweth how to deliver the godly out of temptation and to reserve the unjust unto the day of judgment to be punished.’

Such

Such is the argument drawn by the apostle Peter from these ancient judgments, and it is very remarkable that our Saviour himself makes nearly the same use, though in a still stronger way, of these well known and famous events, explaining by the means of them the surprize and consternation which will overtake not the few profligate and more abandoned only, but the worldly-minded and careless, and unbelieving in the day of judgment: and how important as well as truly charitable is it frequently to warn men of these sayings of that Saviour, whose name we all profess to reverence, and in the truth of whose words how shall we refuse to trust! For are not many persons seen living at their ease up to the hour of their death, who are by no means religious and yet are no more afraid that a day of wrath is coming, than the world of unbelievers were on the day before the flood. Hear then I say our Saviour's description of the surprize which will one day overtake such persons.

‘As were the days of Noah so also,’ says Christ, ‘shall the coming of the Son of Man be. For as in the days that were before the

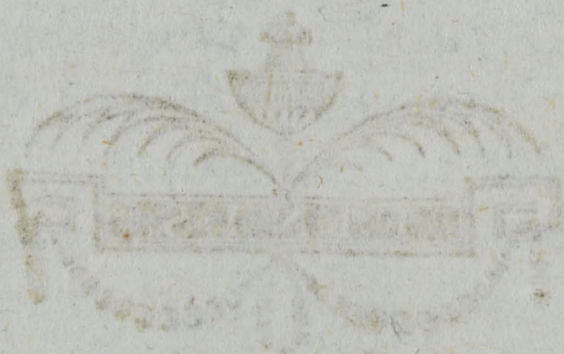
' the flood, they were eating and drinking,
 ' marrying and giving in marriage, until the
 ' day that Noah entered into the ark, and
 ' knew not until the flood came and took
 ' them all away, so shall also the coming of
 ' the Son of Man be. Likewise, also as it
 ' was in the days of Lot, they did eat, they
 ' drank, they bought, they sold, they plant-
 ' ed, they builded. But the same day that
 ' Lot went out of Sodom it rained fire and
 ' brimstone from heaven and destroyed them
 ' all. Even thus shall it be in the day when
 ' the Son of Man is revealed.'

But on the other hand, let the humble
 and fearful Christian learn from another part
 of the same story to trust in the almighty
 grace and goodness: for as the threatenings
 of God are sure to the wicked, so also are
 his promises sure to them that unfeignedly
 repent and believe in Jesus Christ. They
 shall be safe amidst all dangers. When ' that
 ' great and terrible day of the Lord' shall
 come, ' in which the elements shall melt
 ' with fervent heat, and the earth with all
 ' the works thereof shall be burnt up,' they
 having committed their souls into the hands
 of Christ, having believed his testimony and
 walked,

walked, though in the midst of an evil generation, according to his holy word, shall then be like Noah in the ark safe amidst the surrounding storm. And it may be added, that even in this world, when the times grow dark and threatening, and calamity, either public or private, seems to break in upon them like a flood, when the tempest lowers and the clouds seem to gather over all the surrounding countries — even then I say God's promises of mercy shall be seen by them shining like the rainbow over the cloud, for amidst all their troubles and afflictions they shall be reminded of their interest in the Saviour and in the everlasting covenant of their God.



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