

# Advent Studies 2009

God's Covenant  
*with*  
Noah, Abraham, Moses and David.



**Week 1: Noah**

Bishop Michael Hough, in his recent commentary on Genesis, says that what we have reached at the beginning of chapter 6 is *"an institutionalizing of sin and evil, were a whole generation of people, a whole culture have turned away from the way they were called to be living and have corrupted themselves whilst corrupting others"*. Sin has become a way of life for the whole of community and when it has reached this stage, what choice does God have left open to him?

## Prayer before discussion

Loving God,

In a world of darkness you sought and found a righteous, faithful man; one who obeyed your command to build an ark. When all appears lost around us, help us to listen for your voice; even when you ask us to do things that others might question.

Guide our discussion, help us to be gentle with each others reflections, let us find time to hear you speaking amidst the experiences and journeys of others.

This we ask through Jesus Christ Our Lord. **Amen**

## Discussion Questions

1. Did God have to send the flood?
2. Why did God choose Noah and his family?
3. Is the covenant universal - all people / all time?
4. How do we benefit from the covenant today?
5. Does the rainbow still speak to you of God's promise?

# The lead up to the covenant

## The story of the flood - Genesis 6:5 - 8:22

The story of the flood begins on a sombre note: *'God saw that the wickedness of man was great on the earth and all thoughts in his heart fashioned nothing but wickedness all day long'*. The next line gives us a real shock *'God was sorry that he had made humankind on earth and he was grieved to his heart.'*

So the background to the flood is in summary:

- God saw that wickedness was great on the earth.
- God was sorry he had made humankind of the Earth.
- God said "I will wipe out humankind from the face of the earth".

## Primeval History not Factual History

We need to accept from the beginning that we are dealing with primeval history and not factual history: the writers and editors of this section of the bible are concerned for the deeper and inner meaning of history as they reflect upon it later in their own time and situation. It is generally accepted that the two streams of writing combined in this story come from the J Stream (in the early days of the Monarchy circa 950BC) and the P Stream (written during the Babylonian exile 550 BC and later).

## God Creates and then God Destroys?

From the beginning of Genesis God is shown as living in a relationship with his creation, a relationship of his own choosing. When humankind sins, and in a destructive and malignant way whereby all their days are filled with nothing but the planning of wickedness, God cannot help but to become involved. Here we have this apparent contradiction of God who on the one hand is the great Creator and on the other turning around and destroying all that he had created and had seen to be "good".

One theologian who has struggled to put these two aspects of God together came to this insight:

It is the simple truth that God experiences regret when he sees his original loving plan frustrated, that he experiences pain when his holy love is rejected and that he does not decide on the extinction of the world with cold indifference. The divine judgement and the divine pain are about two sides of the same coin, the external and the internal of one and the same reality.  
(Delitzch)

# How to Use This Study

These study notes may be used by individuals for private study but will be found to be more effective when used in combination of private study and group discussion. The questions are designed to help you reflect on the text under discussion as you draw from your own personal experiences and listen to the reflections and experiences of others within your group.

## Become familiar with the text

Each week there is a passage of Scripture associated with the Covenant that we will be reflecting on for that week. Make sure you have opportunities to read, re-read and reflect upon the text with the assistance of these questions (reproduced each week) before you move on to the commentary provided and the group discussion. The questions to be used for individual reflection are:

- What is the covenant being made?
- Who is the covenant between?
- What can we expect as a result of this covenant?

## A Change away from the Sunday Gospel

With the Advent studies over the past few years the focus has been to concentrate on the Gospel for each of the Sundays in Advent. This has necessitated either preparing for the Gospel for the Sunday to come or looking back on the previous Sunday's Gospel.

The Culmination of the Advent season in the great Feast of the Nativity of Our Lord (Christmas) is in itself the celebration of the beginning of the bringing about of God's New Covenant which is sealed in the Death and Resurrection of Our Lord. A further study, for personal reflection or for use as a final group study is provided on this New Covenant.

## The setting for the Study

There are no hard rules for this but it is important to ensure that a comfortable and welcoming approach is taken and that those attending are encouraged to bring others along. Notes about the setting and style from the previous Advent studies can be re-visited if you need help.

# What is a 'Covenant'?

**In Law:** It is a contract drawn up by a deed; it can also mean a clause in a contract

**In Theology:** The word Covenant Speaks of an agreement that brings about a relationship of commitment between God and his people.

Central to the Jewish faith are the Biblical Covenants that God made with Noah, Abraham, Moses and David. Alongside these, there is the centrality of the Ark of the Covenant, dating from the time of the Israelites wandering in the wilderness, being carried about under King David and finally being placed in Solomon's great temple. It contained the tablets of the laws of the ancient Israelites. The phrase Old Covenant is used in Christian theology to describe the covenant between God and Israel as described in the Old Testament.

The phrase New Covenant is used in Christian theology to describe the covenant between God and all humankind made possible by the death and resurrection of Jesus Christ.

In this series of studies we will look at some of the covenants God made with his people in the old Testament and then look at how these covenants find their fulfilment in Jesus and his church.

# The Covenant God makes with Noah

## Genesis: 9, 11 - 18.

God said to Noah, I establish my covenant with you, that never again shall all flesh be cut off by the waters of a flood, and never again shall there be a flood to destroy the earth." God said, 'This is the sign of the covenant that I make between me and you and every living creature that is with you, for all future generations: I have set my bow in the clouds, and it shall be a sign of the covenant between me and the earth. When I bring clouds over the earth and the bow is seen in the clouds, I will remember my covenant that is between me and you and every living creature of all flesh; and the waters shall never again become a flood to destroy all flesh. 'When the bow is in the clouds, I will see it and remember the everlasting covenant between God and every living creature of all flesh that is on the earth.' God said to Noah, 'This is the sign of the covenant that I have established between me and all flesh that is on the earth.'

## Preparation for this study

If you have time, begin reading the story from the start of Genesis chapter 8 - where the flood subsides - through verse 20 where God makes his promise to Noah, then on through chapter 9 to verse 18.

As you are reading, have these questions in your mind:

- What is the covenant being made?
- Who is the covenant between?
- What can we expect as a result of this covenant?

Make some simple notes for yourself as you try to answer these questions reflectively whilst you are reading. Revisit your notes before you progress with the study or attend a group study.