

In His Hands: Genesis 7:17-8:5

Main Idea: Believers can trust God's faithful care even when life feels beyond their control.

I. Out of Control | Genesis 7:17-24

Genesis 7:17–24 brings the judgment of the flood to its terrible fullness. Moses repeatedly emphasizes that the waters “prevailed” over the earth until even the mountains were covered and every land-dwelling creature outside the ark died. The world Noah knew has disappeared beneath the water, and the categories of animals described in verses 21–23 echo the living creatures God filled the earth with in Genesis 1:20–28. The reversal of creation we saw beginning earlier in the flood has reached its conclusion. Genesis 6:7 says that God would “blot out” man and animals from the face of the land, and Genesis 7:23 intentionally returns to that language: “He blotted out every living thing.” **The waters are the means of judgment, but God remains the One exercising authority over them.** As Psalm 29:10 says, “The LORD sits enthroned over the flood; the LORD sits enthroned as king forever.” Noah is safe, but the circumstances of where he, his family, and the animals will end up is out of his hands. This passage should deepen our understanding of the relationship between God's sovereignty and man's responsibility. Scripture consistently places those truths beside one another rather than forcing us to choose between them. Noah had spent years faithfully obeying God's commands for him regarding the ark, but Noah himself has no control over the waters of the flood. (Gen. 6:14–22; 7:1–9). Proverbs 16:9 says, “The heart of man plans his way, but the LORD establishes his steps.” James does not condemn people for planning what they will do tomorrow, but he does confront the assumption that we have control over our days (James 4:13–15). **Christians should plan wisely, and keep commitments. The problem is when we equate good planning with guaranteed outcomes.** Jesus reminds us of our limits when He asks, “Which of you by being anxious can add a single hour to his span of life?” (Matt. 6:27). Reminding ourselves that we are finite creatures and God is infinite keeps us humble and dependent on Him, even as we walk in obedience.

This becomes important when we try to measure someone's faithfulness only by results. Paul tells the Corinthians, “I planted, Apollos watered, but God gave the growth” (1 Cor. 3:6–7). Paul and Apollos were responsible for the work God gave them, but neither of them could produce growth in a person. That belongs to God. The same is true for believers today. We are called to obey what God has said, use what He has given us wisely, and remain faithful even when we might not see the resulting fruit. **Scripture says that “it is required of stewards that they be found faithful” (1 Cor. 4:2).** Part of being found faithful is not using excuses for when we genuinely do fall short of God's standards. Sometimes obedience will produce results we immediately see, and sometimes it won't. An important question for believers to ask themselves is “Did I trust God and faithfully do what He asked me to do?” **God's sovereignty does not give us an excuse to be disobedient, but we must remember that life does not depend on us.**

Verse 24 adds something that is easy to overlook: “The waters prevailed on the earth 150 days.” This isn't a brief period of time where things are out of Noah's hands, this is months. Day in and day out Noah resides within the ark only able to take care of what God has entrusted to him. **Long periods of waiting on God can often expose whether our trust in God is tied to getting quick fixes.** It is one thing to say that God is in control when difficult circumstances last a few days, but faithfulness in extended difficulties reveals maturity. Jehoshaphat's prayer captures the posture well: “We do not know what to do, but our eyes are on you” (2 Chron. 20:12). There will be times when believers genuinely don't know what God is doing, but we are called to keep our eyes on Him, continue in obedience to Him, and refuse to treat longer seasons of uncertainty as evidence that He has lost control. **Believers must learn to stop treating uncertainty as something that has to be resolved before they can rest in God.**

To Ponder:

1. What dangers come from confusing God's faithfulness with having an easy life? Biblically, how should a believer live during prolonged seasons of difficulty?
2. In what areas of your life are you most tempted to try and take control of circumstances beyond being obedient to God? How can a believer know when they have crossed that line?

II. God Remembers | Genesis 8:1-5

Genesis 8:1 is the turning point of the flood account: “But God remembered Noah and all the beasts and all the livestock that were with him in the ark.” Remembering does not mean that Noah had slipped God's mind. In Scripture, when God “remembers,” it describes Him acting according to a commitment He has made. God told Noah before the flood, “I will establish my covenant with you” (Gen. 6:18), and now His covenant faithfulness moves toward action. We see the same language when Israel suffers under slavery in Egypt and “God remembered his covenant with Abraham, with Isaac, and with Jacob” (Ex. 2:24–25). God had never forgotten the covenant, and His remembrance is followed by His intervention. It is also worth noticing that Genesis 8:1 includes the animals with Noah, because God has not abandoned His creation. **God's remembrance shows us that His promises are not empty words. He acts according to what He has spoken.** The judgment has been devastating, but His purpose is not the destruction of creation for its own sake. Noah, his family, and the creatures preserved with him are being carried toward a world in which life will continue, something God will make explicit when He later establishes His covenant with Noah and “every living creature” (Gen. 9:8–10).

Once God “remembers,” the narrative changes. Chapter 7 repeatedly described the waters increasing, covering, and prevailing. Now God sends a wind over the earth, the fountains of the deep and windows of heaven are closed, the rain is restrained, and the waters begin to recede (Gen. 8:1–3). The same God who brought the judgment is bringing it to an end. The Hebrew word translated “wind” in Genesis 8:1 is *ruach*, the same word used in Genesis 1:2 when the Spirit of God hovered over the waters. Genesis 8 shows us how the flood had undone the ordered world, and now God begins ordering it again. **God's sovereignty is not only displayed in His power to judge, but also in His power to preserve life and restore what judgment had undone.**

Verse 4 says that the ark finally “came to rest on the mountains of Ararat.” Noah's name had already been associated with the hope of rest in Genesis 5:29, and now the ark carrying Noah “rests.” The rest is still imperfect. Noah is still on the ark, the waters are still in the process of receding, and verse 5 says the tops of the mountains don't become visible until later. The ark is resting, but Noah is still waiting on the Lord. Once Noah does eventually step off the ark, he will come face to face with the reality that the world he knew before the flood is gone. **God's restoration doesn't always mean restoring life to our version of “normal”.** For believers, that means His work is focused on conforming us “to the image of his Son” (Rom. 8:29), even when that work takes us through circumstances we would not have chosen for ourselves. Ultimately, God's work of restoration is built on the promise, “Behold, I am making all things new” (Rev. 21:5).

This is why believers need something more solid than circumstances as the evidence of God's faithfulness. Zion looked at her suffering and decided that, “The LORD has forsaken me; my Lord has forgotten me,” but God answered, “I will not forget you” (Isa. 49:14–16). Difficult circumstances do not mean that God has abandoned his people. The clearest evidence of God's covenant faithfulness is found in Christ. Zechariah describes His coming as God acting “to remember his holy covenant” (Luke 1:72), and Paul says that “all the promises of God find their Yes in him” (2 Cor. 1:20). **When God's providence is difficult to understand, believers should interpret their circumstances through what God has clearly revealed rather than allowing their circumstances to redefine their relationship to God.** We may not always understand what He is doing, but in Christ we have already been given sufficient reason to trust that He has not forgotten His people.

To Ponder:

3. What does God's remembrance in Genesis 8:1 teach about His nature and relationship with humanity?
4. Scripture shows us that God is more concerned with conforming us into the image of Christ than restoring our version of “normal.” Would you say your hope is more rooted in becoming like Christ or God making your circumstances easier?