

Genesis 8:20

Authorized King James Version (KJV)

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.

Analysis

And Noah builded an altar unto the LORD; and took of every clean beast, and of every clean fowl, and... This passage belongs to the primeval history section (Genesis 1-11) which establishes universal truths about God, humanity, sin, and divine purposes before focusing on Abraham and Israel. These chapters answer fundamental questions about human origins, the spread of wickedness, God's judgment, and the preservation of a righteous remnant.

Recurring patterns emerge: human sin escalating from individual disobedience to societal corruption, divine patience followed by judgment, gracious preservation of a remnant, and covenant promises ensuring redemptive purposes continue. The genealogies connect historical persons, demonstrate the fulfillment of divine promises (blessing and multiplication), and trace the line leading to Abraham and ultimately Christ.

Key theological themes in this section include:

1. sin's destructive progression affecting all humanity
2. God's righteous judgment while preserving mercy
3. human pride and autonomy opposing divine sovereignty
4. cultural development as both blessing and potential idolatry
5. God's sovereign plan advancing despite human rebellion.

These narratives provide the necessary context for understanding God's calling of Abraham and the covenant promises through which all nations will be blessed.

Historical Context

The primeval history (Genesis 1-11) parallels ancient Near Eastern traditions including Sumerian King Lists (pre-flood longevity), Akkadian flood traditions (Atrahasis, Gilgamesh), and Mesopotamian city foundation myths. However, Genesis demythologizes these traditions, presenting monotheistic history rather than polytheistic mythology. The genealogies connecting Adam to Noah to Abraham provide historical framework absent in pagan myths.

Archaeological evidence confirms ancient urbanization (chapter 4's cities), agricultural development, metallurgy, and musical instruments emerging in Mesopotamia's early history. The Babel account reflects Mesopotamian ziggurat construction (stepped pyramid temples), particularly in Babylon. Linguistic diversity requiring explanation was obvious to ancient peoples, making the Babel narrative culturally relevant.

For Israel in covenant with Yahweh, these chapters explained their relationship to surrounding nations. All peoples descended from Noah, but Israel descended from Shem through Abraham—chosen for blessing all nations. The flood demonstrated God's justice and mercy: judging wickedness while preserving the righteous. This pattern would recur throughout Israel's history, assuring them that God's covenant faithfulness endures despite judgment on the wicked.

Related Passages

James 2:17 — Faith and works

Romans 1:17 — The righteous shall live by faith

Study Questions

1. What theological truths about New Beginning emerge from this passage?

2. How can we apply the principles from this passage to contemporary challenges in family, work, or church?
3. How does this verse fit into the broader biblical story culminating in Christ?

Interlinear Text

בְּבָהָמָה	מִכְלָא	לִקְחָה	לִיהְיוֹת	בְּמִזְבֵּחַ	בְּנֵי	בְּנֵי
bulid H1129	And Noah H5146	an altar H4196	unto the LORD H3068	and took H3947	H3605	beast H929
וְעַל	בְּנֵי	בְּנֵי	בְּנֵי	בְּנֵי	וְעַל	וְעַל
and of every clean H2889	H3605	fowl H5775	and of every clean H2889	and offered H5927		
עַל	תְּבָנָה	בְּמִזְבֵּחַ	בְּמִזְבֵּחַ	בְּמִזְבֵּחַ	עַל	עַל
burnt offerings H5930	an altar H4196					

Additional Cross-References

Romans 12:1 (Sacrifice): I beseech you therefore, brethren, by the mercies of God, that ye present your bodies a living sacrifice, holy, acceptable unto God, which is your reasonable service.

Genesis 22:9 (Sacrifice): And they came to the place which God had told him of; and Abraham built an altar there, and laid the wood in order, and bound Isaac his son, and laid him on the altar upon the wood.

1 Peter 2:9 (Parallel theme): But ye are a chosen generation, a royal priesthood, an holy nation, a peculiar people; that ye should shew forth the praises of him who hath called you out of darkness into his marvellous light:

Hebrews 13:10 (Sacrifice): We have an altar, whereof they have no right to eat which serve the tabernacle.

Exodus 10:25 (Sacrifice): And Moses said, Thou must give us also sacrifices and burnt offerings, that we may sacrifice unto the LORD our God.

Genesis 13:4 (Sacrifice): Unto the place of the altar, which he had made there at the first: and there Abram called on the name of the LORD.

Genesis 7:2 (Parallel theme): Of every clean beast thou shalt take to thee by sevens, the male and his female: and of beasts that are not clean by two, the male and his female.

Genesis 13:18 (Sacrifice): Then Abram removed his tent, and came and dwelt in the plain of Mamre, which is in Hebron, and built there an altar unto the LORD.

Genesis 26:25 (Sacrifice): And he builded an altar there, and called upon the name of the LORD, and pitched his tent there: and there Isaac's servants digged a well.

Genesis 35:7 (Sacrifice): And he built there an altar, and called the place El-beth-el: because there God appeared unto him, when he fled from the face of his brother.

From KJV Study • kjvstudy.org