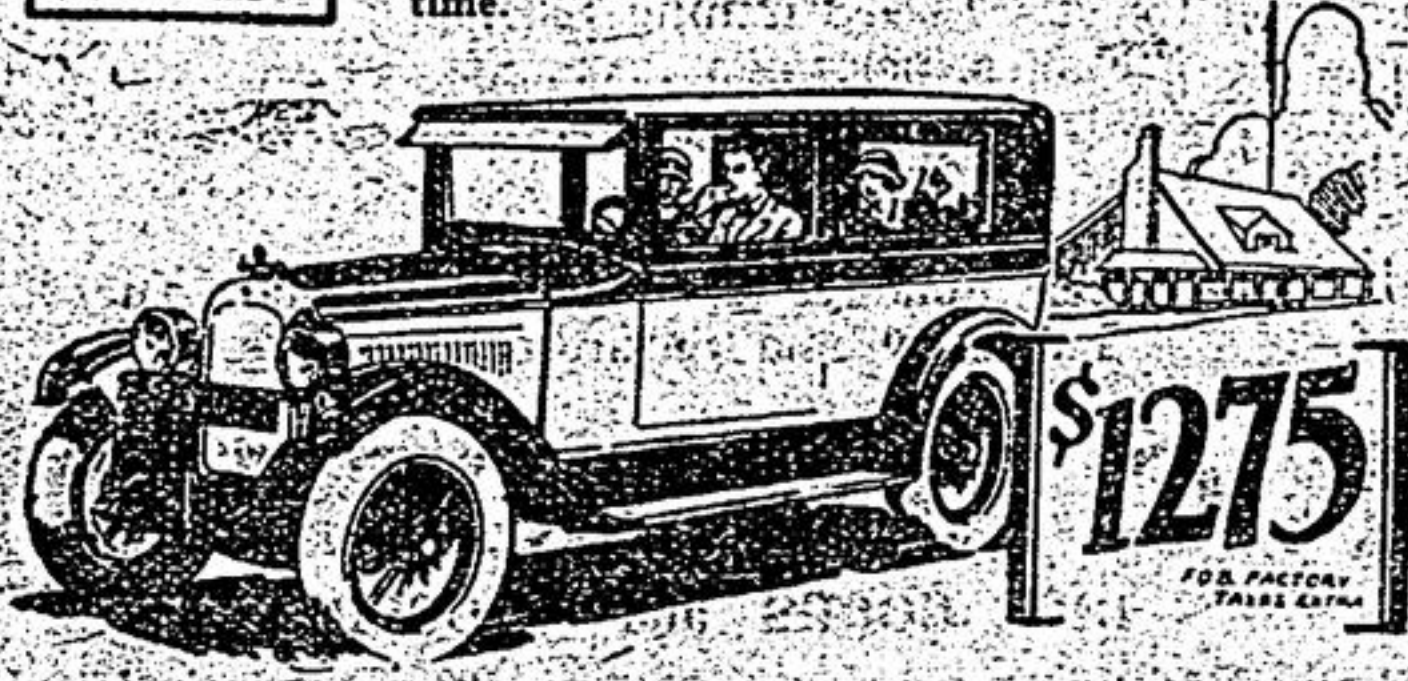


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S.S. LESSON

May 2. God's Covenant With Noah. Gen. 8: 22 to 9: 29. Golden Text—*As I shall be for a token of a covenant between me and the earth.*—Gen. 9: 13.

ANALYSIS.

I. NOAH'S FAMILY HISTORY, 5:28-32.
II. THE SIN OF THE ANGELS, 6: 14; AND OF MAN, 6:5-12.
III. STORY OF THE FLOOD, 6:13 to 8:14.
IV. THE ALTAR AND THE PROMISE, 8:15-22.
V. THE BLESSING AND THE COVENANT, 9:1-17.

VI. NOAH AS VINEDRESSER, AND HIS THREE SONS, 9:18-29.

INTRODUCTION—Noah is the tenth and last of the patriarchs before the flood, chap. 5. Like them he is represented as having lived to a very great age (9:29), and like Enoch (5:22), he is described as a good and pious man, "a righteous man, and perfect in his generations," a man who "walked with God," 6:9. So, in the midst of a wicked world, he "found grace in the eyes of the Lord," and was saved with his family from perishing in the great flood. Compare what is said of Noah in Hebrews 11:7.

I.-III. 5:28 to 8:14.

There has been found an interesting parallel to the story of the flood, contained in these sections; in a series of closely written tablets of baked clay found in 1872 in the ruins of an Assyrian palace on the banks of the Tigris river. They formed part of the library of an Assyrian king of the seventh century, B.C. The story, which they contain, comes from an old Babylonian source and tells of a council of the gods which resolved to send a flood upon the earth. A certain man, who was a favorite of one of the gods, received warning, built a great ship, and saved himself, his family, and his dependents, with domestic and wild animals, from drowning in the rising waters. Many of the details of this story are closely like the story in Genesis, but they differ very greatly in their conception of the character and purpose of God. The idea of God in Genesis is pure and high, untainted by evil passions, in strong contrast to the quarrelsome, deceitful, vindictive pack of Babylonian deities.

Both narratives, in all probability, preserve the memory of some great catastrophe of the lower Mesopotamia country, one of the earliest homes of the human race. That region is still covered with water in the spring and early summer by the floods of the Tigris and Euphrates rivers, fed by the melting snows of the Armenian mountains. There must have been a

much greater inundation than usual, perhaps accompanied by a widespread seismic disturbance, which to the simple folk of that early age, would have seemed to cover the whole earth. There is no sufficient reason for declaring, as some modern writers do, that the Flood Story is unhistorical, but there is no evidence that the flood of waters covered the whole world as we know it to-day. The extent of the earth was unknown to that age, and when those who first told the story said, "the whole earth," they must surely have meant the earth, or the land, which they knew.

IV.-V. THE BLESSING AND THE COVENANT, 8:15 to 9:17.

There is reason to believe that this entire narrative of the flood and what followed is drawn from two older sources. The material has been carefully and intricately woven together so as to form a continuous narrative, but it is quite possible in many places to distinguish the two strands. For example 8:20-22, in which the divine name is "the Lord," a translation of the Hebrew *Yahweh*, comes from one of these older sources, and 9:1-17, in which the divine name is "God," from the Hebrew *Elohim*, is from the other.

Two very ancient laws appear in 9: 4-6, a prohibition of the eating of blood, and of the taking of human life without cause. The life of man is held sacred, because he is made in the image of God.

9:8. The word "covenant" has a very important place in the religious teaching of the Old Testament. Its primary meaning is "bond." It represents an agreement between two parties, freely entered into, but then involving an obligation of the most binding character. Under this figure is represented again and again the relationship into which God enters with chosen men and with a chosen people, with Noah; and Abraham, and Israel under Moses' leadership, and David the king. God is revealed making his promises to men, and men in their turn undertake obedience to the laws of God. The same obligation rests upon both to observe and keep the terms of the covenant bond. As God is true to his promise so must men be true. As he is faithful so must they be faithful. The same standard of righteousness which they attribute to him must be theirs.

9:13. "My bow in the cloud." After the storm of rain the rainbow appears. If the destructive rain was a symbol of God's anger, the rainbow which followed became a sign of his mercy and his forgiving grace. Of course the rainbow is a natural phenomenon, produced by the refraction, as in a prism, of the rays of light, and it is not said here to have been now created for the first time. But it now becomes a sign of the covenant promise, a symbol of the mercy and restored favor of God.

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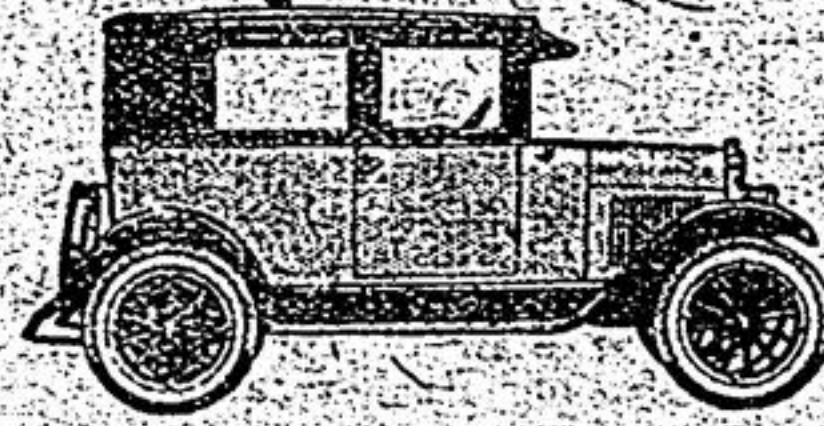
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