PROLOGUE

God created a perfect paradise. But man and woman fell into sin, and a general rot set in. Disease and death were not part of God’s original plan, but now they infected the earth everywhere. Weeds cluttered the ground. Animals grew ferocious and fought among themselves. Human beings were the worst offenders: unlike the beasts, people disobeyed God and knew they were doing so, intentionally helping to ruin the divine creation as much as they possibly could with all their corruption and violence.

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The Creator was angry! Perhaps He should simply give up on what He had created, destroy the world, and start all over again?
Noah did this; he did all that God commanded him. Then the Lord said to Noah, “Go into the ark, you and all your household, for I have seen that you are righteous before Me.” Genesis 6:22–7:1

Noah himself had no doubts at all. Scripture tells us that he “was a righteous man, blameless among the people of his time, and he walked with God” (Genesis 6:9). Clearly, this was as close to the Creator as any creature could get. And if there were any family discussions about how the neighbors were making fun of the ark-building enterprise, Noah brushed it off and told Shem, Ham, and Japheth to get on with their work and ignore the ridicule.

We have no idea how long it took to build this huge ship, but construction went on and on. Slowly it took shape. With the hull intact, the sides reached to within 18 inches of the top, where a roof angled down across this gap to keep out the rain while permitting fresh, outside air and light to fill the ark, probably through windows. It was a good design. Would one expect anything less from God?

One wonderful day, the ark was finally finished, and Noah and his family loaded it with food and other provisions. But what about the animals who were supposed to come in pairs—male and female—to board the craft? It would have taken months to round up and capture all the species of animals, birds, and crawling creatures involved. Would this throw a wrench into God’s plans?
The flood continued forty days upon the earth.... The waters prevailed and increased greatly on the earth, and the ark floated on the face of the waters. Genesis 7:17–18

Day after day, week after week, the rain continued. This was no gulleywasher, not even some regional flood. Creeks became rivers, while rivers long since swelled far beyond their banks. Lakes became seas, and finally the waters of the oceans poured in from the seashore to join them in furious foaming.

One morning, Noah and his crew looked out the window and saw no land at all—only a vast ocean of water surrounding their craft. The deluge covered the earth itself.

Because of the pelting, endless rain, Noah and his sons must have made a daily tour of the ark to check for leaks in the roof. Far more dangerous would be leaks in the hull, for they could sink the ship. But there were none: the tarry pitch was doing its job, and they had built their boat very well indeed. God’s protection, of course, was an even more important reason.

For forty days and forty nights it went on—no sun, no moon, no stars—just endless clouds and the longest, most drenching rainstorm in history.
CHAPTER NINE

And Noah removed the covering of the ark and looked, and behold, the face of the ground was dry. Genesis 8:13

After you take a shower, the quickest way to dry your hair is to aim the hot blast of a hair-dryer on it. On an infinitely larger scale, God did the same thing after the flood. As the Bible tells us, “He sent a wind over the earth, and the waters...receded steadily” (Genesis 8:1, 3).

Soon the mountaintops broke onto the horizon, and the ark ran aground in the Ararat mountains, somewhere in what is today eastern Turkey. Should they open the ship’s door and release their cargo of livestock, birds, and wild animals? Of course not! They would freeze at that altitude or drown in waters that still covered the valleys. So how was Noah to know the right time to exit the ark?

Very cleverly, he opened a window in the ship and released a dove to see if it could land anywhere. The dove returned, unable to find a spot to perch. A week later, Noah sent it out again. This time it returned with a fresh olive leaf in its beak. Since olive trees do not grow at high elevations, the bird virtually told Noah that water was receding even from the valleys. Just to be sure, Noah sent out the same bird a week later, but this time it did not return. The flood had ended; the earth had dried out.

When Noah looked out of the window of the ark, he could see for himself. There stood the mountains and the valleys with no water to be seen, except for the little lakes that had been there previously. It was a beautiful sight!
Then Noah built an altar to the Lord and... offered burnt offerings on the altar. 

Genesis 8:20

Now they could safely leave their huge, wooden life-preserver so graciously specified by God. The ark had come to rest against a natural elevation on the mountainside that served as a perfect ramp for another parade, this time by beasts delighted to be free of their cramped stalls. Two by two, they scampered off in all directions to repopulate the world’s animal kingdom. If they had been able, they would likely have thanked Noah for his maritime hospitality.

Noah and his family thanked God Himself, of course. First things first. Just after leaving the ark, Noah built a stone altar to the Lord and performed sacrifice in gratitude for His saving them all from a terrible, watery death.

For His part, God was pleased with Noah’s righteous obedience and now made a colossal promise to him—and to all humanity: Never again would He destroy mankind through a flood or any other means. In beautiful poetry, the Lord put it this way:

As long as the earth endures, 
seedtime and harvest, 
cold and heat, 
summer and winter, 
day and night 
will never cease.

And so it has been ever since.