

2. Noahic Covenant - Genesis 9

The Basics of the Covenant

- The Noahic Covenant is *proposed* and *anticipated* in 6.18 before being *established* and *developed* in 8.20-22; 9.1-17.
- The Noahic Covenant is the *first* covenant, and therefore the first stage, in God's programme to establish a *new* creation, far superior to the first. The Noahic Covenant guarantees the *realm* (planet Earth) in which the kingdom will be established. It is our assurance that God will sustain the order of creation as long as the earth remains.
- The Noahic Covenant is *unconditional*. **God** chose to make this covenant – He was the Giver, man the receiver. This is emphasised throughout: "I, behold, I" (9.9); "I will establish *My covenant* with you" (9.11); "This is the token of the covenant which I *make*" (9.12). Though the covenant places certain obligations on humanity, their failure to meet these (a reality which 8.21 envisages) does not mean God will renege on His promises.
- The Noahic Covenant provides a foundation for the promises of *other* covenants. For example, the fact that "day and night shall not cease", a provision of the Noahic Covenant (8.22), proves that the Davidic and Priestly Covenants cannot fail (Jeremiah 33.20-21). The Noahic Covenant also forms the basis of the New Covenant, for Israel, as a nation, will continue as long as the sun, moon, stars, night and day exist (Jeremiah 31.35-37).
- The historical context of the Covenant is important. After the devastation of the flood, mankind could have thought life was *cheap*, and the taking of life, *trivial*. But the Covenant re-affirms God's thoughts about the **sanctity of life** – it is **precious** to God. God will *protect* it, and mankind must not *abuse* it.
- The flood, and Noah's preservation *through* it (not from it), is a picture of the remnant of Israel being preserved through the Tribulation. The narrative of Genesis 9 therefore anticipates a future time of millennial peace.

The Breadth of the Covenant

- **Participants.** This is the widest of all the covenants. The beneficiaries were *Noah* and his *sons* (9.1), Noah's *descendants* (9.9) – from which the entire human race descended after the flood. Also included was "every living creature" (9.10) and "all flesh" (v.11). This is expanded still further to incorporate "the earth" in 9.13.
- The covenant is as wide as creation itself. Its universal scope implies that the blessing God has planned will ultimately encompass, not just one people or nation, but the *whole earth*.
- **Permanence.** The covenant is described as "everlasting". It has never been abrogated or rescinded; thus the provisions and requirements of the covenant persist to the present day. This includes the eating of meat (1 Timothy 4.3-4) and the authority of civil government to effect the death penalty (Romans 13.4; Acts 25.11).
- The word "everlasting" (9.16) does not necessarily mean eternal. Sometimes it denotes a long, indefinite period of time – a period which the context defines as "while the earth remains" (8.22).

The Basis of the Covenant [Genesis 8.20]

- Noah built an altar. This is the first mention of the word "altar" in Scripture – the next will be built by Abram (12.7). On both these occasions, the altar (and its sacrifice) are a worshipful response to the grace of God. Noah had been *preserved* through the flood, and God had made a great *promise* to Abram.
- It is possible that *before* the flood, sacrifices were brought to the visible manifestation of God's presence (the *Shecinah*) at the gate of Eden (3.24). Now, after the flood, this has been removed. God, as it were, had withdrawn to heaven – thus an altar was required to elevate the sacrifice and point upwards towards heaven.
- After the *falling* deluge of judgment, there *ascended* from the altar a "sweet savour" of a burnt offering. The *aroma* caused God to make an *announcement* giving Noah perfect *assurance* the world would never be flooded again.
- It is the sacrifice of Christ that has given God the satisfaction of an *eternal* sweet savour. The work of Calvary has not only provided salvation but guaranteed a future blessing for the world – natural, physical, *and* human!

The Blessings of the Covenant [Genesis 8.21-22]

- The Noahic Covenant contains *one* great **promise** (blessing) not to *flood* the earth again, and therefore guarantee its *function* as long as it remains. This is supplemented by one great **provision** – Noah and his sons were commanded to re-populate the earth (emphasised twice in 9.1, 7). To sustain this *fruitfulness*, there would be a requirement for animals to be used as *food*, and an accompanying *framework* to promote the sanctity of life.

One Great Promise

- **Flood** (8.21). Despite the ongoing evil heart of man (the very cause of the flood, cf. 6.5), God would never again "smite" every living thing. "I will not again curse the ground" is not revoking the curse of 3.17, but, rather, the promise not to send another *universal* flood. This promise is re-affirmed in 9.11 (cf. Isaiah 54.9).

- Whilst there would be *local* floods that would take human life, there would never be another global flood to destroy “all flesh”. The next time God brings universal judgment, it will be by fire not water (2 Peter 3.10).
- **Function** (8.22). While the earth is in existence (an ominous warning), God will preserve the functionality of the planet. There will *always* be seasons, variations in temperature and “day and night” – the *cycle of life* will continue. Noah had just experienced a year when the difference between night and day was indiscernible. But there would never be another year like that! However *irregular* the human heart may be (v.21), there will be a *regularity* in God’s world and its cycles.
- It is quite possible the magnitude of judgment of the flood shook the earth on its axis. The variation in seasons and climate is a direct consequence of the Earth’s tilted orbit around the sun.

One Great Provision

- **Fruitfulness** (9.1, 7). Though mankind had been all but eradicated in the flood, God had not finished with humanity. Noah and his family were commanded to “multiply” and fill the earth (cf. 1.28). On this occasion, there is no mention of “subduing” the earth. With the fall of man, he has lost his authority to Satan.
- **Fear** (9.2). Though man’s authority over the earth was lost, he was still to have authority over the animal kingdom as it would be an important supply of food – “into your hand are they delivered”. As a means of self-preservation, animals would be “fearful”, even ‘terrified’ of humans. The word “beast” refers to undomesticated, wild animals. Despite what some may campaign, mankind is *superior* to and of *greater value* than animals (Matthew 6.36).
- **Food** (9.3). Man’s diet would now change. Previously, he had been vegetarian, but now every plant *and* animal was fit for food. It is likely that the ecology of the earth had been so changed by the flood that vegetation alone would not be enough to sustain man. Animal meat would be needed as a supplement to diet.
- **Framework** (9.4-6). Taking life, whether animal or human, was a serious matter. Thus, God established a framework to promote the sanctity of life. Animals were not to be killed in a wanton, barbaric way, but responsibly. Blood is the symbol of life, for “the life of the flesh is in the blood” (Leviticus 17.11) and required to make an atonement for the soul. Animal flesh must therefore be drained of its *pulsating lifeblood* before consumption. Slaughterhouses generally drain blood from animal carcasses within minutes of death. What appears to be blood, even in the rarest steak, is actually a protein called *myoglobin*.
- A special sanctity attaches to human life because man is made in the “image of God”. He therefore is not merely *like* God (with intellectual, moral and spiritual capacity) but he also *represents* God. To attack the life of a human being is therefore an *attack* on, and an *affront* to, God.
- If a human being was killed by a beast, God would “require” justice (exacting compensation) by putting the animal to death. Likewise, if a human being was killed by another human being, then he must be put to death. The capital punishment exacted would be at the hand of either God, or human institution ordained by God.
- The *broad* principle is stated in v.6. The *narrower* statement of v.5 is given to take account of the peculiar situation of Noah and his family. “At the hand of every man’s *brother* will I require the life of man”. The word “brother” can mean a relation by blood or marriage, or a **fellow countryman** (Nehemiah 5.1). According to NET, the language here “*reflects Noah’s situation (after the flood everyone would be part of Noah’s extended family), but also supports the concept of the brotherhood of humankind. According to the Genesis account the entire human race descended from Noah.*” So, all men are responsible to see that this justice is executed.
- This is the institution of capital punishment for premeditated murder. Whilst the giving and taking of life is the prerogative of God alone, a mandate is given here for the *societal* and *governmental* execution of a murderer. No doubt, the person charged must be justly tried and their guilt established (in the mouth of two or three witnesses). This is a mandate that belongs under the jurisdiction of established authorities (Deuteronomy 19.15-21; Romans 13.1-5). Law would be necessary for the stability and preservation of life in the new order.

The **Bow** in the Cloud [Genesis 9.12-17]

- The “token” or ‘sign’ of the covenant would be a “bow in the cloud”. It is likely this is the first time in human history a rainbow was seen. Before the flood, the earth was watered by a mist rather than rain.
- The word “bow” is the typical word for a *weapon* – as in a ‘bow and arrow’. God had already sent the arrow of judgment on the earth in the flood. Now the war was over, and the heavenly warrior hangs his bow in the sky pointing towards heaven. The bow ceases to function as a symbol of combat and becomes a symbol of peace.
- A rainbow is caused by reflection and refraction of white light in water droplets. It is made up of a myriad of individual spectral colours that have overlapped and mixed – many of which are invisible to the naked eye. It is a visual representation of the “manifold” (variegated colours) grace of God (1 Peter 4.10).
- The rainbow is primarily for God – “I will look upon it” (9.16). He “remembers” His covenant, not in the sense of memory recall (!), but His faithful and active involvement in keeping the promises of the covenant.