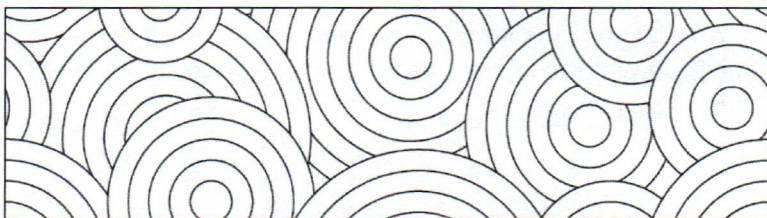


LESSON 8

GOD'S COVENANT

GENESIS 9:1-20



OPEN IT UP

Following the flood, a number of changes occur. First, God will turn His attention away from the entire world and focus on a single family. Second, God will permit the consumption of animal flesh for the first time, as we will see. Third, God will (or the new conditions of the world will) gradually reduce the span of human life. No longer will men live into their 800s and 900s. The world will be different. These conditions probably also made it impossible for certain species of animals to survive, such as many of the extinct species of the fossil record.

LAND AND PROVISION • GENESIS 9:1-7

God's first instructions to Noah after exiting the ark are reminiscent of God's original instructions to Adam and Eve: "Be fruitful and multiply, and fill the earth" (Genesis 9:1; cp. 1:28). God made humans and animals to reproduce, and He made the earth to be inhabited. But God would not restore the original station of humanity. Whereas humans and animals had lived in harmony before, now God permitted the consumption of animal flesh: "Every moving thing that lives shall be food for you. I have given you all things, even as the green

herbs” (9:3). We stated in lesson one that humans were herbivores in the beginning (1:29). Here humans are allowed to be carnivores but within strict limits.

Life is sacred in the Bible, and blood was a sign of life (Leviticus 17:11). Therefore, humans are not permitted the consumption of meat with the blood (Genesis 9:4). The principle is later explained: “Only be sure that you do not eat the blood, for the blood is the life; you may not eat the life with the meat” (Deuteronomy 12:23). Therefore, every animal had to be drained completely of its blood (cf. Leviticus 1:15; 5:9). Today, this is what (at least partially) makes meat “kosher” at a Jewish butcher.

The principle of the sanctity of life is combined with the command to be fruitful and multiply (Genesis 9:6–7). This is no accident. It is our role as humans to bring life into the world, not to take life out. Therefore, God says, “Surely for your lifeblood I will demand a reckoning” (verse 5). God will hold humanity accountable for the blood of man and beast. God is not opposed to the death penalty for extreme crimes (Leviticus 20:2; Deuteronomy 21:21), nor is He against war (Deuteronomy 20:16–18). Nor is God against hunting and fishing, which this very passage permits. The point here is that humans need to learn to respect life. We cannot kill indiscriminately. Shooting crows for fun is offensive to God. Opening fire on a crowd of innocent bystanders is a sin. If we remember we will be held accountable for the blood we shed, we will treat all life with a higher degree of respect.

THE RAINBOW • GENESIS 9:8-17

God promises to establish His covenant with Noah’s family (Genesis 6:18), and here we find the application of that covenant (9:9). It involves both man and animals (verse 10), and apparently the terms are the rules regarding life given previously. There are essentially two types of covenants in the Bible: a covenant between equals (human covenants; e.g., 31:44), and a covenant between unequals (divine covenants, as here). But regardless of the type of covenant, all covenants include three elements: (1) terms and conditions for maintaining the covenant; (2) a promise to obey the terms; and (3) a sign or symbol to mark the significance of the covenant. All three elements are covered here.

First, God gives the terms in Genesis 9:1–7. Since humans and animals are covered by the covenant, they must treat one another with respect, which means the principle of life is honored, symbolized by humanity’s treatment of blood. Second, the covenant includes a promise: “Never again shall all flesh be cut off by the waters of the flood; never again shall there be a flood to destroy the earth” (verse 11). God asks humans to respect life, and He, too, agrees never to destroy life on such a grand scale again. God already had a plan to redeem humanity rather than destroy humanity (Ephesians 1:7; Hebrews 9:15).

Third, God’s covenant with Noah includes a sign, a “rainbow in the cloud” (Genesis 9:13). This passage does not claim that the rainbow was a new invention. Perhaps rainbows already existed. But, if so, the sign takes on new significance. As common as floods are in the world even today, there has not been since Noah’s time a global flood that destroyed the world. God has kept His promise, even if humanity continues to rebel against Him.

NOAH THE FARMER • GENESIS 9:18–20

It is interesting that Noah turns to the profession of Adam and Cain (planter) rather than the profession of Abel (shepherd). Perhaps we can detect in his behavior a desire to remain located in one place rather than to travel with animals, and thus a tension toward the command to “fill the earth” (Genesis 9:1). In any case, we are told “Shem, Ham, and Japheth” survived the flood and exited the ark (verse 18). Further, from these three, “the whole earth was populated” (verse 19). The genealogies in Genesis 10 make clear that Ham and Japheth were far more prominent, establishing the ancient world’s greatest civilizations—Egypt, Assyria, and Greece, just to name a few. Shem, by contrast, was the father of the Hebrew people, who were never prominent on the world stage like the descendants of his brothers. Revenge against Ham (Egypt) and Canaan (verse 18) would come with the exodus from Egypt under Moses and the conquest of Canaan under Joshua.

Scripture informs us that “Noah began to be a farmer, and he planted a vineyard” (Genesis 9:20). Why Noah chose to plant a vineyard, we do not know. He appears to have been the first to do

so, and therefore did not understand the effects of fermentation on grape juice. As a result, he becomes “drunk ... in his tent” (verse 21). Alcohol has a powerful impact on our mental state. Virtually everyone knows of someone who abuses alcohol. It creates tension in families, ruins lives, and dulls good judgment. This is why the wise Solomon advises, “Who has woe? Who has sorrow? Who has contentions? Who has complaints? Who has wounds without cause? Who has redness of eyes? Those who linger long at the wine, those who go in search of mixed wine. Do not look on the wine when it is red, when it sparkles in the cup, when it swirls around smoothly; at the last it bites like a serpent, and stings like a viper” (Proverbs 23:29–32). Noah learned this unfortunate lesson the hard way. Let’s not repeat his mistake.

WRAP IT UP

The flood is now only a memory for Noah and his family, but the dramatic lessons must have remained with them and their descendants, for virtually every ancient culture has a flood story. Sometimes the details are strikingly similar to the biblical account, as is the case with the *Epic of Gilgamesh*. Sometimes the details are very different, such as the recently discovered cuneiform version in which the saving boat is round rather than rectangular. The existence of an Utnapishtim or a Deucalion or the similarities among the ancient flood accounts in no way impugns the credibility of the Bible. On the contrary, the fact that many other cultures have flood stories is evidence that a flood *actually happened*, and that it was so dramatic that human history has collectively kept the story alive in its memory.

**THINK ON IT**

1. List some of the changes to the world after the flood. What do you think were the reasons for these changes?

2. How should godly people treat the sports of hunting and fishing? How should godly people view the death penalty? Base your answers on Scripture.

3. What three elements are involved in biblical covenants? How are these elements present in the new covenant under which Christians live?

4. Discuss the dangers of alcohol. Why is it important for people to be aware of the problems alcohol can create?

5. Do you think the flood stories in other cultures harm the credibility of the biblical flood account? Justify your answer.