

Genesis: The Book of Beginnings

The Covenant with Noah

Genesis 9

Noah is a new Adam. He is given a new world brought out of water. He bears God's image, walks with God, rules over the animals, and farms. Like Adam he sins and experiences shameful nakedness, which is then covered. He is in covenant with God, has three sons, one who sins greatly. God's covenant with Noah reveals his intention to bless. He promises to preserve the world in order to spread his grace. But though God offers all these things freely and abundantly, we have to receive and walk in them humbly by faith.

What are the blessings of God's covenant with Noah?

Just as God blessed Adam, he blesses Noah and tells him to be fruitful, multiply and fill the earth (v1). This is one of the reasons for marriage (Mal. 2:15). The fear of Adam is on the animals, birds, creeping things and fish because he can eat them now (vv2-3). This is delicious but not required (Rom. 14:1-4). There are distinctions between men, animals and plants. Man is above them but only as a steward who also has a master. He may not eat the flesh with the blood in it (Prov. 12:10). He is not God and may not try to become one. Because man bears the image of God, and the one who kills him, beast or man, forfeits his life (vv5-6). This is the first mention of the *lex talionis* and it's given to establish capital punishment. God's justice prevents the injustice and revenge that spread before the fall (4:23-24). God recreates and blesses mankind so it won't be defaced by murder and violence (v7).

What is the sign of this covenant?

God has promised to preserve the earth (8:21-22), but now he explicitly establishes his covenant with Noah, his offspring, and every creature (vv8-11). He calls the sign "my bow" (v13). Twice Scripture associates a rainbow with God's glory, once as his brightness (Ez. 1:28) and once as the light around his throne (Rev. 4:3). It's as if God is making a special appearance to tell the world destruction will not come upon it. The rainbow is a sign that means God remembers (v15). He will see it and remember (v16). The covenant with Noah is often marginalized as "common grace." But why does God give common grace? What are people who see it in the sky supposed to think when they see it? God's common grace always serves his efficacious grace (cf. Acts 17:26-27). This is why he puts up with evil on the earth (v21). The bow points up because God has hung up his war bow and isn't cursing the earth (Ps. 18:14, 7:12). The covenant is radiant, beautiful and everlasting.

What are the consequences of this covenant?

"Noah and his family lived happily ever after, eating lollipops and finding pots of gold at the end of rainbows." One of the reasons we know the Bible isn't a myth is because it doesn't read like one. You would think Noah would be like an experienced game warden and rancher, mastering animal husbandry and taking dominion over the earth. Instead he's like a rodeo clown, drunk and passed out naked in his tent (v21). Young men want to be cool and old men want to be comfortable, and both desires lead to particular sins. When the days of peace and comfort settled in, instead of growing further in wisdom and righteousness, Noah got slack. Marcus Dods: "Noah is not the only man who has walked uprightly and kept his garment unspotted from the world so long as the eye of man was on him, but who has lain uncovered on his own tent floor." Of course this sin doesn't ruin his entire testimony, but neither is it insignificant. Just because God brought Noah and his family into the covenant did not mean they would walk with the Lord. Ham walks in, sees his father's nakedness in a deliberate way, and tells his brothers (v22). Shem and Japheth walk in backward to cover him (v23). Noah hears about what Ham did because Ham made a fool of him, exposing the sin of his father. Noah curses Canaan not out of random spite, but because he is already walking in the way of Ham—mocking, godless, sin-exposing ridicule (v25). He is stating what is already the case. Noah blesses *Yahweh*, the God of Shem, and he prays that God would enlarge Japheth, a word play on his name. He also prays that Canaan would serve them both, the first glimpse of the conquest. Noah dies and our hope is not in him, but like him in the greater Noah, God of Shem, who came to draw all people to serve him willingly.

NOTES FOR LITTLE SAINTS

Today's Passage: Genesis 9:12-16

12 And God said: "This is the sign of the covenant which I make between Me and you, and every living creature that is with you, for perpetual generations: 13 I set My rainbow in the cloud, and it shall be for the sign of the covenant between Me and the earth. 14 It shall be, when I bring a cloud over the earth, that the rainbow shall be seen in the cloud; 15 and I will remember My covenant which is between Me and you and every living creature of all flesh; the waters shall never again become a flood to destroy all flesh. 16 The rainbow shall be in the cloud, and I will look on it to remember the everlasting covenant between God and every living creature of all flesh that is on the earth."

1. What was the sign that God gave and to whom did he give it (verses 12-13)?
2. A covenant is relationship between God and his people. The sign of the covenant is something that marks the covenant. What does God do when he puts the rainbow in the sky (verses 14-15)? What should you think when you see the rainbow?
3. The rainbow is like a bow and arrow, and it tells us that God will never flood the earth and destroy all the life on it again. Why do you think he will never do this again? Why did Jesus come to give his life for the world?
4. Draw a picture of a rainbow in the sky and the ark resting on the Mount Ararat with the animals coming off of it.

Memory Verse to Recite Next Week:

I have set my bow in the cloud, and it shall be a sign of the covenant between me and the earth.

—Genesis 9:13