
Into the New Creation

Genesis 9

Introduction How do we who are of the new creation live in the shadows and remnant of the old creation? Paul writes, “From now on, therefore, we regard no one according to the flesh. Even though we once regarded Christ according to the flesh, we regard him thus no longer. Therefore, if anyone is in Christ, he is a new creation. The old has passed away; behold, the new has come.” [2 Corinthians 5:16-17, ESV]

Our text this morning reminds us that even the greatest of saints can still sin. So, out into the new creation steps Noah, his family and all the animal kingdom. Having offered a propitiation and praise offering that pleases God, Noah now begins to move into the new world. God has determined not to destroy life and to sustain the environmental order. Now, that determination to spare life is carried out in two important relationships: Noah and His God; Noah and His Family

Noah and His God

(v.1-17)

When God determines what He will do, He then moves to implement that plan. In this section, God speaks to Noah. He first blesses through the giving of commands then speaks in the making of a covenant.

The Commands to Noah

(v.1-7)

Notice how this section is book ended by “be fruitful and multiply” highlighting its theme. In the face of the great destruction and loss of life in the Flood, God here gives commands that have at their core the honor and value He has given to life.

For the Propagation of Human Life

(v.1-4)

God first set of commands are aimed at encouraging the proliferation of life, both animal and human.

Noah and his descendents are expected to populate the earth. They are to be fruitful, multiply and to fill the earth. A part of the dominion mandate given to Adam is here repeated. Noah is already exercising dominion. Now, the obligation is to fill the earth with people. The command here is not only to reproduce, but also to disperse. The “fill the earth” has the idea of spreading out over the whole face of the earth. This will be important to remember when we come to Babel.

The animal kingdom will now fear (or better, be in terror) of humans. Since there will be a great number of animals who will multiply and spread, they would constitute a real threat to mankind. God here changes the relationship between man and animals giving them a natural, in-born fear of man.

Permission is also given for mankind to eat meat. It is quite evident from the Genesis account and from the food stores taken onto the ark, that before the Flood, God had not granted permission to eat meat. This does not mean that humanity had not; it is almost certain that some of the violence filling the earth before the Flood would have spilled over into man killing and eating animals. So man may have disobeyed God before, but now God graciously grants permission to eat meat. I want to remind you that there is nothing spiritual about being a vegetarian. Not eating meat is covered under liberty, but it is the limitation of being the weaker brother. Let us also take to heart Paul's words in 1 Timothy 4:1-5 where he writes, *Now the Spirit expressly says that in later times some will depart from the faith by devoting themselves to deceitful spirits and teachings of demons, through the insincerity of liars whose consciences are seared, who forbid marriage and require abstinence from [meats] foods that God created to be received with thanksgiving by those who believe and know the truth. For everything created by God is good, and nothing is to be rejected if it is received with thanksgiving, for it is made holy by the word of God and prayer. [ESV].*

In the permission, there is also an important prohibition. When eating flesh, it was to be properly drained and prepared. This permission and prohibition would be expanded in the Mosaic Law into the *kosher* food regulations.

For the Protection of Human Life

(v.5-7)

God has just destroyed all life, except for Noah and his family. God has also given permission for mankind to eat meat. In this context, God now gives commands that are designed to protect human life.

GOD'S REQUIREMENT is that is any human or animal that takes a human life should be punished. There is a reckoning to be made. God will require that from both animals and man. Here is the institution of sword of justice in the hands of human government. God authorizes capital punishment for capital crimes. Here is the means to restrain the sin of man as expressed in the murder by Cain and the side-spread violence before the Flood. If an animal or a human murders a human, then punishment in kind must take place.

I cannot but note that at one level, animals and humans are put in the same category. They are both culpable and punishable before God. However, they are also clearly placed in different orders of being. Animals may be slain and eaten. But human life is different. A man must not be murdered. Human life is protected; human life is to be honored and respected.

GOD'S REASON is given in the short poem in verse 6. Human life is protected because man is made in God's image. The difference between man and animals is not self-awareness or soul – it is that we are image bearers. Murder then is a striking out at the image of God in man. It is a striking out against God. We preserve and protect human life, not because it is sacred, but because it represents the life and image of God.

So God puts into place commands which are to organize corporate life together and orients that life towards God. Humans, made in the image of God, their life is to be honored by propagation, provision and protection.

The Covenant with Noah

(v.8-17)

Now that God has commanded Noah, He also covenants with Noah. Here is what is often called the Noahic Covenant.

Its Significance

The Noahic Covenant is important for two reasons: it initiates and illustrates covenant making.

ITS PLACE in the Scriptures is to establish the category of covenant making and keeping as foundational to relating to God. This is the first recorded covenant in the Bible. It is designed to introduce God's people in all generations, to being related to God through a covenant relationship. Other metaphors are used as well, like family, nation, etc. There is lots of debate as to whether there are covenants earlier in history than the Noahic Covenant. Some would say that like altars which obviously were used earlier in history than their first recording here in Genesis 8, covenants existed but are just now being revealed. I have serious questions about that, but this is neither the time nor place to get into those discussions. In my mind, we should only have as formal covenants what the Bible names as formal covenants. Theological reconstruction of covenants, not specifically called such in the text itself, is probably attempting to take one area of relating to God and trump it with another metaphor. In spite of all that discussion, clearly, the Noahic Covenant is the first *covenant* in the Bible directly so called. God says, for the first time in inspired, inerrant revelation, "I will make a covenant..."

ITS PURPOSE in the Mosaic account is to show how God provides for the welfare of all that He has made. In the commands, life is to be honored and recognized among men. This covenant then serves as a model of how God also will preserve and protect life. Having experienced the judgment of God and moving into a new world, Noah and his family are promised and are assured that kind of judgment will not fall again. As a result, Israel, in hearing of this covenant with Noah, gains confidence in God and hope for the future as they receive covenant promises in the midst of their own moving from the old world of Egypt into the new world of Canaan. That God makes and keeps His promises, often in spectacularly greater ways than the covenant itself might seem, should encourage us and cause us to move forward into the new with faith in Him.

Its Signatories

Covenants also have the people or parties to the covenants. They are its signatories. They are those who are related through the covenant. The Noahic Covenant is a unilateral covenant in which God simply declares what He will do. God is the initiator and guarantor of this covenant. He comes to man to make these promises for the good and blessing of mankind.

Noah receives the promise on behalf of all, both mankind and the animal kingdom (v.9-10). The covenant is received by Noah who represents all mankind. Through Noah, all of us receive and participate in this covenant. God promises what He does through Noah to us. This is a very important concept in the Bible. We all recognize the power of representatives to act on our behalf. We do this with lawyers and our elected government offices. God carries out His divine plan on behalf of His people through Divinely appointed representatives. They may receive a covenant that is later transmitted to and accepted by generations not yet born. In some cases, their actions are also seen as having a “on the behalf of others” aspect.

Its Stipulations

Covenants in the Bible also have stipulations. These are the elements of the promise relationship where the content, the conditions and the consequences of the covenant are articulated. The Noahic Covenant is primarily an unconditional covenant. God simply promises what He will or will not do. In this case, God promises never to destroy the all life again by a flood (*mabbul*) nor to destroy all the earth by a flood.

I am struck immediately by the fact that this covenant is given in the context of judgment. If there had been no judgment on sin, then the covenant would have little meaning. It reminds us that our redemption is very precious to us because of God’s great wrath against our sin and the judgment that will surely take place.

There is some discussion as to whether verses 1-7 are an integral part of the covenant. If so, then there are requirements placed on those to whom the covenant is given. That would be, in other covenants, the commands or conditions of the covenant. While I have distinguished between the commands and the covenant following the structure of the text, there is deep and unifying theme between these two sections.

Its Sign

As a visible, perpetual reminder or seal of the once given promise, a covenant usually has its seal. We exchange rings at weddings a visible tokens or seals of the marriage covenant and vows. We do so because we have learned from the Bible that God gives seals and tokens to remind all of us of His promises and our responsibilities.

The sign then of the Noahic Covenant is the rainbow in the clouds. It does not matter whether rainbows existed before the Flood. What matters is that God has taken rainbows and vested them with this significance. Rainbows remind us of God’s judgment and His promise. The rainbow, usually associated with rain and sun, is supposed to now point us to God, to all that He performs and all that He promises.

The rainbow is interesting as a theme in Scripture. Ezekiel saw a rainbow over the throne of God as giving hope in the midst of exile (Ezekiel 1:28). The rainbow is also seen around the throne of God in Revelation 4:3. The mighty angel of Revelation 10:1, probably the Lord Jesus, is described as

having a rainbow about His head. In all these cases, the rainbow reminds us that the sovereign God has promised to judge, but not to utterly annihilate. He will deliver His people out of wrath and bring them safely through to home, safely out of the old and gloriously home into the new.

The covenants that will follow in the Bible, the Abrahamic, the Mosaic, the Davidic, the New (Everlasting) Covenant, develop the multi-faceted ways in which God relates to His people. Through the covenants, we hear God's unyielding and unending commitment to deliver His people, to bless them and to bring them into relationship with Himself so that they respond with obeying faith and deep delight.

Noah and His Family

(v.17-28)

The placing of these two accounts next to one another and even the fact of this account has had commentators scratching their heads. While we might be surprised at the open exposure of Noah's failure, we are graphically reminded that sin is pervasive and it is powerful, even in the new order, the new creation.

Moses now turns to the unfolding story of history flowing from Noah and his sons. The aim here is to show how the nations developed (v.18-19). Noah's three sons are the root from which all the nations came and dispersed. Immediately, Canaan is highlighted for Israel so that they will be careful to note what happens and what it means. The focus of the aim is to locate the line of Israel and to show why the Canaanites were Israel's mortal enemies.

Note: Some have used this text to argue for three distinct races of man, with the curse on Canaan (Ham's son) setting apart the "black races" to be servants. Certainly, this is not an exposition but a gross imposition on the text. Ken Ham and the scientists at AIG have clearly shown that there is only one race of man, with distinctions arising from genetic expansion and isolation over the long period of history since the Flood.

There are many important things to consider as we think through this text. If you will allow me, I would like to walk through it and then, under the last point, try to deal with some bothersome questions this raises.

Noah's Problem

(v.20-24)

Moses takes us directly from Noah standing as the great recipient of God's covenantal promise and regent over the new world to Noah lying drunk and naked in his tent. Noah *begins* to be a man of the soil. Allen P. Ross points out this word in this form in Genesis, *begins*, takes on an ominous note. It introduces decline occurring in the midst of normal, ordinary life. Noah simply begins to be a farmer. But more than that, he becomes a man of the earth, earthy. He plants a vineyard. There is nothing evil here either. God Himself is a vinedresser and His people are a vineyard. Juice and wine are elements of celebration and emblems of joy.

But Noah has been fooled by the wine. It has mocked him. He has drunk too much and is now inebriated to the point that he throws off his robe and is lying down naked in his tent. Again, Ross is helpful here in that this is obviously not at a time or in a place where there is an expectation of privacy. The language here is not just unclothed, but immodestly exposed. So here is the decline and degradation of Noah.

Then, the story moves forward with one of his sons. Again, Moses is making a point by the indirect, through Canaan reference to Ham, signaling why this narrative is here. Ham goes into the tent and sees the nakedness of his father. This is not casual but intentional. There is a sense that Ham went in with a purpose to

see the degradation of his father, probably not expecting that he would be naked. However, he comes out and tells his brothers. Now remember, these are not teenagers. These are grown men with wives. The Hebrew seems to imply that Ham's actions here are wicked – that he went in, that he looked the way he did and the way he told his brothers. In other words, this is not, “Ooops”. This is, “Yeah, dad is such a spiritual giant. He is lying in there drunk out of his mind and exposed for all to see.” From the consequences and from the contrast of the brother's actions, we know that what Ham did was very wrong. Ham has acted, possibly out of rebellion, but certainly with the intent to dishonor and disrespect his father.

It has to hit us how differently Shem and Japheth respond. They take great pains to not violate God's Law, to honor their father and to act as a rebuke to their brother. The Mosaic Law has much to say about modesty. It is emphatic that the nakedness of a father or mother is not to be exposed to children. We can only surmise that Noah and his sons know God's mind on this. They know they are to honor their father. They know that true love and filial honor will hide or cover sin. So, they take a garment, drape it between them and go into the tent backwards. They cover their father, going to great lengths not to see him exposed.

Moses records that Noah slept off his alcohol and then found out what had happened to him. When he is sober, he is told what happened. When he does, as the prophet-priest of his family, he begins to speak an oracle by the Holy Spirit. Now, some have thought because of the phrase, “[Noah] knew what his youngest son had done to him” that something sexual is being implied here. Some have gone as far as to suggest that Ham may have committed a homosexual incest with his father while Noah was in this drunken stupor. Others have suggested, using cross references to the Law using the phrase “saw the nakedness” that Ham had gone in and committed incest with Noah's wife. The problem here is that it is reading way too much into the text. The phrase *saw his nakedness* here is different from the phrase *expose his nakedness* used in the Mosaic Law as a euphemism for sex. Further, if Moses wants to show how degraded the Canaanites were from the beginning, why not simply be plain about it? I think the commentators are struggling to make Ham's sin something we would all agree is heinous. The problem here is our own distorted sense of what is wicked and what is Ok sin. I will deal with this in just a moment.

Noah's Prophecy

(v.25-27)

Noah speaks an oracle, a prophecy. Immediately following a Covenant with God and a moral failure by Noah and his son, we have a powerful introduction to the bless and curse motif in the Old Covenant. When one sins, there is a curse. When one obeys, there is blessing. The juxtaposition, the immediacy of these two things must grab our attention. In the midst of fallenness and failure, God's covenant blessing and cursing sets the trajectory for the history of peoples.

The Curse on Canaan

The curse is pronounced on Canaan because of Moses' purpose in writing Genesis. In other words, what is recorded here is what Noah said, but it is recorded so that Israel might understand who the Canaanites are. If Israel is going to go into the land and toss out the wicked Canaanites, here is part of the

rationale. Also, the curse and blessing here shows how the character of an individual can become the character of a people. Moses uses this motif at the end of the book as well when the character of the sons of Jacob are identified with the later character and conduct of the tribe. Finally, the curse on Canaan, Ham's youngest son is a reflection of the sin of Ham, Noah's youngest son.

Canaan is cursed with servitude. He will not only be just a servant, but the servant of servants. The construct is both showing his abject slavery and its emphatic surety. Then, he reiterates in each of the blessings on the other boys. Canaan will be their servant. So, when Israel comes to the promised land, they are entering what God has given them and also are carrying out God's plan and purpose for the Canaanites as well.

God warned Israel about the depravity of the Canaanites in Leviticus 18:2-6 in language that is much like that of the sin of Ham. After a long list of lewd and depraved sins in verses 7-23, God says that these very evils are what the people they were to drive out were doing. Ross helpfully points out that the Canaanites were enslaved to all kinds of sexual sins which are described with language intended to invoke Ham's sin. Thus, as Moses is giving the Torah, he is creating internal connections in the text that helped the people to abhor the sins they were to avoid.

The Blessing on Shem and Japheth

Look carefully at the blessing in verse 26. It says, "Blessed be the LORD, the God of Shem." In this song or Psalm, praise is given to God for the blessing He bestows. But even more startling than that, God is blessed in the blessing of Shem. God so connects His own happiness and joy with His purposes and plans for Shem that He is blessed by Shem. Delitzsch says, "[Yahweh] makes Himself a name in becoming the God Shem and thus entwines His name with of Shem, which means *the name*." [cited in *Creation and Blessing*, Allen Ross, p. 218].

The blessing on Japheth comes through the form a prayer in the song. The blessing is that of enlargement and expansion. Japheth will have many descendants, much territory and great achievement. He is portrayed in the safe and secure relationship of family and guest in one's home. And Canaan will be his servant as well. When we talk in chapters 10-11 about the determination and the dispersion of the nations, we will see who their descendants become.

One final note, God uses His personal name, "Lord" with Shem and His transcendent name with Japheth. Yet those who dwell in the common tabernacle of Shem will know the God as Lord. Through these we are taken to the Lord Jesus who is the true Shem, the true Israelite. All blessed gentiles will dwell in family relationship with the Lord, all who are in Christ, in His Tabernacle.

Lessons

Let's think together on some very important lessons that the people of God are to learn from this.

Redemptive history selects events to serve thematic purposes.

I come back to this again. The narrative here selects and develops the stories in order to make a redemptive historical point. We are not just focusing on the folly of Noah, the failure of Ham and the humble wisdom of Shem and Japheth. We are seeing the events through which God exposed the character of the three boys and set the course of nations in motion.

We have few categories today that help us see how terrible Ham's sin was.

What's the big deal? Most of you have struggled a bit with this to try to imagine what Ham did that is so bad. The Bible however treats what Ham did as very sinful. So we do not have to try to say that more is going on here so that we make it fit our categories. We need to adjust our understanding of immodesty, parental dishonor and tale-bearing so that we are gripped by the sinfulness of these sins.

Small sins may have far-reaching consequences.

We also struggle with the proportion here. How can such small actions have such enormous consequences? How can the future shape of nations and peoples arise from 2 simple acts, one of disobedience and one of obedience? God's economy and way of doing things is rooted in this principle. The actions of Adam take down the whole human race. The disobedience of Ham affects all his progeny. The redemptive work of one man, the Lord Jesus Christ, accomplishes salvation for His people.

The Bible has a high regard for sobriety, modesty and parental honor.

This message needs to come through loud and clear. Drunkenness, immodesty, indecent dress and lifestyles, dishonoring parents all are symptoms of paganism. Take note, all of you, but listen to me young people. God prizes the sobriety, modesty and careful, obedient wisdom shown by Shem and Japheth. God abhors the drunkenness and immodesty of Noah and the parental dishonor shown by Ham, *even as an adult*. You need to think about this. You need to decide whose values and whose approval you seek. You need to consider your ways. May God give you a heart to hate evil and love good. May God give you grace to be controlled by the Spirit, modest and discreet in your attitudes and attire while honoring your parents for the glory of God.

May God make us serious about sin in our own lives. May we guard against the kind of attitudes and actions that brought such disgrace on Noah and sin by Ham with consequences for all. In all this, come to Jesus. Come to Him for cleansing, renewal and grace to be ever pleasing to Him. **Conclusion**