

God's Covenant with Noah: Genesis 8-9
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Last week we looked at the story of Noah and the Flood in Genesis 6. We heard the message from God's Word that judgment is coming. Just as God brought judgment on all mankind in Noah's day, a similar, yet even greater, judgment is coming in the future. Possibly the very near future. Right now God is waiting patiently, but He will not wait forever. Those who continue in rebellion against Him will be punished forever in hell. But those who trust in Jesus Christ will be forgiven and will spend eternity in heaven.

That's the message of judgment and rescue that we see in the Flood. This week in chapters 8-9 we will see the Flood subside, and we will read of God's gracious covenant with Noah and all humankind.

As I said last week, Noah and his 3 sons spent decades, possibly even a century, building the ark. It was a massive boat that was the length of a football field and a half. They built this boat according to God's instructions, and then the rain came. Noah and his wife, and their sons and their wives, all boarded the ark, along with two of every kind of animal. Chapter 7:16 says, "And those that entered, male and female of all flesh, went in as God had commanded him. And the Lord shut him in." Then it rained for forty days and forty nights. And the ark floated on the water, while everything else was destroyed. Only those in the ark survived. After the forty days the rain stopped, but the last verse of chapter 7 says that "the waters prevailed on the earth 150 days." That's about five months.

Then 8:1 tells us, "But God remembered Noah and all the beasts and all the livestock that were with him in the ark." This is a very precious verse. God remembered Noah and all those who were with him. This doesn't imply that God had forgotten Noah. It doesn't mean that God looked in His day planner, or saw the piece of string tied around His finger and said, "Oh! I have to save Noah!" That's not what this means. When the Bible tells us that God remembered something, it is covenantal language. It is a statement of God's commitment to keep His promise. For instance, after God destroyed Sodom and Gomorrah, it says that God "remembered Abraham" (Genesis 19:29). God also remembered Rachel and "listened to her and opened her womb" (Genesis 30:22). Then in Exodus when the Israelites were slaves in Egypt, "God heard their groaning, and God remembered his covenant with Abraham, with Isaac, and with Jacob" (Exodus 2:24).

The statement that God remembered Noah means that God was committed to keeping His promise to Noah. And at this point God acts. God finally caused the waters gradually to go down. Think about this from Noah's perspective. He had been locked inside this floating zoo, wondering how much longer it would be until the nightmare was over. Has God forgotten me, Noah may have thought. Then God acted.

This is a precious verse because we may sometimes wonder if God remembers us. The horizon may look very bleak from your vantage point. It may appear that God has forgotten. The time of trial may seem never-ending. But God will always keep His promises. For those who love Him and are called according to His purpose, all things work together for good (Romans 8:28). So don't despair. Be patient. He has not forgotten you.

The waters began to recede, then the ark rested on mount Ararat. Noah sent out a raven, and then a dove. The dove came back because the water was still covering everything. So he waited a week and sent the dove out again, and this time the dove brought back an olive leaf. A week later he sent the dove out again, and she didn't return. Then God instructed Noah to go out from the ark. And if you compare the age of Noah in 7:11 and 8:14, you'll see that it was a little over a year that Noah was in the ark.

Now we come to the passage that I want to focus on this morning. Genesis 8:20 – 9:17. This is the covenant that God made with Noah.

God Renews His Creation

There are four headings I'll use this morning to organize the message. Let's start by looking at how God Renews His Creation. There are many parallels between the events of creation and the events following the Flood. The things that happen here in chapters 8-9 have a striking similarity to the things that happened back in chapters 1-2, and Moses, the narrator, is intentionally trying to highlight those similarities. One similarity is the watery chaos out of which God creates and re-creates. In chapter 1 "the Spirit of God was hovering over the face of the waters," and in chapter 8:1 "God made a wind (which is the same word as spirit, *ruach*) blow over the earth, and the waters subsided." So in both cases we see God bringing order out of watery chaos.

Also, in chapter 1 God blessed the animals and told them to be fruitful and multiply (1:22). And in 8:17 He does the same, telling Noah to bring the animals out of the ark "that they may swarm on the earth, and be fruitful and multiply on the earth." And again with human life. God gives the same command to Adam, and also to Noah. In 1:28, "Be fruitful and multiply and fill the earth and subdue it and have dominion over the fish of the sea and over the birds of the heavens and over every living thing that moves on the earth." Then to Noah and his sons in 9:1, "Be fruitful and multiply and fill the earth." Finally, it is stated in each case that man is made in God's image. All human beings bear the image of God. God said it at creation, and He said it again when He renewed His creation.

In all these ways we see that God's creation has a new beginning following the Flood. This is a new start. God's blessing on man and animals is renewed with those who come out of the ark. Creation was destroyed in the Flood, but it is renewed in the family of Noah and the animals on the ark with them.

In the renewal of His creation God establishes a covenant with Noah and Noah's offspring and also with all the animals. He says, "Never again!" He won't bring this kind of judgment and destruction on the earth as long as the earth remains. There won't ever be a flood like that Flood, a flood that destroys the earth. Nothing like that will happen again until the ultimate judgment, which the Flood was a preview of. The Flood points to that great and final judgment, but there won't be anything like it until then. There are local floods and hurricanes and tsunamis that remind us of the coming judgment. But God will never again destroy the earth with a flood like He did in Noah's day.

Notice that this covenant is a one-way covenant. God makes this covenant, and it depends on Him alone. It is not dependent on whether or not Noah and his descendants are obedient. God doesn't say, "I won't do this again, unless the world becomes evil again." No, God simply says he won't do it again. Period.

This is all of grace, because mankind is still sinful. It's not like the Flood got rid of sin. We are still just as deserving of that kind of cataclysmic punishment. But God graciously promises not to do it again, and He even gives a sign to show that He will certainly keep this covenant. When you see a rainbow in the sky you can think of this passage. Think of this covenant, because the rainbow is a sign and reminder that God will not bring another flood upon the earth to destroy it.

The Value of Human Life

Let's look at another key aspect of this passage, and that is the Value of Human Life. At the beginning of chapter 9, after God tells Noah and his sons to be fruitful and multiply, he says that animals will fear them. And then in verse 3 He says, "Every moving thing that lives shall be food for you. And as I gave you the green plants, I give you everything." This shows us the drastic difference between human life and animal life. Human life is infinitely more valuable and precious. Animals can be used for food. We have clear biblical sanction here to eat meat. That's one of the reasons God put animals here. That doesn't mean we can be cruel to animals. Proverbs says, "Whoever is righteous has regard for the life of his beast." Animals aren't here for us to torture or torment. But we are allowed to kill and eat.

This is not true when we talk about human life. Human life is on a different level, because we are made in God's image. And therefore it is an extremely serious offense against God to take the life of another human being. God shows us how serious it is by establishing capital punishment as the appropriate penalty for murder. Verse 6, "Whoever sheds the blood of man, by man shall his blood be shed, for God made man in his own image." Murder is so serious that the murderer must be executed.

We also see in this God's provision for His creation. This penalty is a means by which murder is restrained. Those who murder should be executed. Romans 13 specifies that it is the governing authorities who must bear the sword in order to punish the wrongdoer. The kind of punishment that God commands in Genesis 9 is appropriate and just, and a healthy society will have a respect for human life and will demonstrate that respect by putting to death those who murder.

The reason God has to give an instruction like this is because sin is still very evident after the Flood. And this leads to the next observation I want to make from this passage.

The Effects of the Fall Are Still Present

The Flood did not erase the sinful nature that each of us inherits from our forefather Adam. Noah was righteous and upright, meaning He followed God's instructions by faith. But he was still a sinner. You'll remember from last week that we looked at Genesis 6:5, which says, "The Lord saw that the wickedness of man was great in the earth, and that every intention of the thoughts of his heart was only evil continually." That is a sad, but realistic, indictment of our sinful nature, our total depravity. Apart from God's grace, the inclinations of our hearts are entirely evil.

In chapter 8 we find that the Flood did not change this situation. God says in 8:21, "I will never again curse the ground because of man, for the intention of man's heart is evil from his youth." This is kind of a strange verse, but the point we're supposed to see is God's grace. God doesn't say, "I will never curse the ground again, because man is no longer sinful." Instead, He's saying that mankind certainly IS still

sinful, but in spite of our sin He promises never to flood the earth again. Sin continues, but God is gracious.

Chapter 9 ends with an example of the sin that continues after the Flood. Lest we think that Noah's righteousness means that he is sinless, the narrative gives us a clear example of Noah's sin. Isn't it a fascinating thing about the Bible that it gives us such a realistic picture of humanity? Even the heroes of faith, whom we respect and admire, the Bible does not idolize them or whitewash their biographies. The Bible tells it like it is, warts and all.

In 9:20 and following we have one of these sad, but true, accounts of sin. It kind of ruins our respect for Noah, but it also reminds us that Noah isn't the hero of the story. God is! Noah is just a sinner like me and you. If you thought Noah was perfect, prepare to have that image of him shattered. After planting his vineyard, "he drank of the wine and became drunk and lay uncovered in his tent." Then Ham sinned by looking upon his father's nakedness and dishonoring his father by telling his brothers. Noah's sin was drunkenness and the impropriety that resulted, and Ham's sin was disrespect for his father.

I already mentioned several similarities between creation and re-creation, and here we notice a couple more similarities between Adam and Noah. They were both farmers who worked the ground. In verse 20, "Noah began to be a man of the soil, and he planted a vineyard." They both sinned. Adam by eating of the fruit, Noah by getting drunk from the fruit of his vineyard. For each of them there was a division among their sons. Cain was the seed of the serpent and Abel, then Seth, were the seed of the woman. And among Noah's sons, Ham received a curse, whereas Shem and Japheth were blessed.

The point is that Adam led the human race into sin. And Noah, who is a kind of new Adam in God's renewal of creation, he is a sinner, too. The Flood was a very significant event in the early history of the universe, and several new and wonderful things resulted from it. But it did not change the fact that we are sinners. It did not erase our sinful nature.

We Need a Savior

And that leads to the last point, that We Need a Savior. Noah, and all of us, are sinners who desperately need a Savior. The offerings that Noah made to the Lord were a picture of this need. When Noah departed from the ark, the first thing he did was make an offering to God. He made an offering of the clean animals he had with him on the boat. If you remember, there was a pair of every animal, but there were seven pairs of the clean animals (7:2). This was for the purpose of food, so that Noah and his family could eat of these animals during their time on the ark. And they were also for the purpose of burnt offerings. And immediately after coming out of the ark, 8:20 says, "Noah built an altar to the Lord and took some of every clean animal and some of every clean bird and offered burnt offerings on the altar."

What do these offerings signify? What's the meaning? Partly, it is an act of thanksgiving and commitment. Noah is worshiping the Lord and expressing thanks for being rescued. But this offering is also a symbol of propitiation, which means it shows how God's wrath is turned away. God's wrath is turned away by means of a substitute. Just think about the development of this narrative and how it foreshadows the Gospel. First, we see God's wrath against sinful humanity. God hates sin. God hates it when we lie or cheat or lust or get angry or gossip, and sin is so offensive to His righteous

character that He must punish sin severely. In fact, the only just punishment for sin is eternal punishment. The Flood was God's judgment upon the world. He punished sin, just as He will do again at the end of the age, when those who are not trusting in Jesus will be cast into hell.

The story of the Flood shows God's hatred of sin and His punishment of sin. And then in chapter 8 there is this picture of atonement for sin. Noah sheds the blood of these clean animals as a way of recognizing that sin deserves death. Sin deserves punishment. That's what the sacrificial system was all about in the Old Testament. Again and again the people witnessed the connection between sin and death, sin and blood, sin and punishment. And all of those sacrifices pointed to the ultimate sacrifice, who is Jesus Christ, the Lamb of God.

Verse 21 says that these offerings were a pleasing aroma to the Lord, and it was only after these offerings that the Lord promised that He would never again destroy the world in a flood. Then chapter 9 begins with God blessing Noah and his sons. Do you see what has happened here? God's wrath gave way to blessing. This is what happens in the death of Jesus Christ. God's anger toward sin is appeased by the Jesus' death, so that His anger turns into blessing.

I want to make sure you understand this, because I want you to believe it. I want you to love this truth. I want your life to be changed by it. You deserve to be punished by God. But Jesus Christ became your substitute, so that instead of you being punished, Jesus was punished. Jesus stood in our place, for all who are trusting in Him and all who will trust in Him, Jesus became our substitute. And God's wrath against sin was satisfied through Jesus' death on the cross. Just like God smelled the pleasing aroma of Noah's offering and then His wrath gave way to blessing, the same is true of the ultimate offering, the sacrifice of Jesus Christ. God's wrath burns against us because we are sinners. But Jesus Christ died on the cross in order to pay the penalty for sin. And for those who love Christ and trust Christ, God's wrath toward us vanishes and instead we receive blessing from God.

In light of this passage that we've looked at this morning, I encourage you to remember that the effects of the Fall are still with us. We are all descendants of Adam, and we have inherited his sinful nature. We are born enemies of God. And that means we desperately need a Savior. We need Someone who will stand in between us and God's wrath, Someone who will appease God's wrath and turn it into blessing. That's what Jesus Christ did for all who repent of their sin and trust in Him. Hear the warning of the Flood, that judgment is coming. And rejoice in the message of God's mercy, that Jesus' offering of His own life has turned God's wrath into blessing for those who repent and believe.