

## **SESSION 56: THINGS CHANGE, PART TWO**

Genesis 9:8-17

January 12, 2025

### **PREFACE**

We began our look at this text in our previous session. Before we press forward, just a few additional thoughts about vv8-10.

As is so often the case, I think we fail to consider the state of mind of the characters in these narratives. So much time has passed since then, that we see them as simply plastic saints—or plastic demons—without considering what would naturally be passing through their minds as human beings—how would their experience be affecting them. And even last week, after reading vv8-17 in class, we remarked about the repetition in the passage. Well, in this setting, these two things go hand-in-hand. That is, *Why did God go out of His way to mention and reiterate so much minutia about His covenant?* One answer to that would be, because of the state of mind of Noah’s family.

I can well imagine that upon emerging from their safe but claustrophobic ark, Noah and his family would have been torn by two powerful emotional thoughts: First they were grateful for the fresh air and sunshine, the dry and unmoving land, with their thoughts filled with future possibilities. But right alongside this—and in fierce competition with their joy at being released—would be their apprehension—their *horror*—that such a catastrophe as the Flood might occur again.

After all, this had been Yahweh God’s method of ridding the earth of man’s persistent sin. These people knew as well as we know today their *own* proclivity toward sin; how did they know whether God wouldn’t turn around and do it again? Imagine spending the rest of your life wondering if every rain storm was just a precursor to another destructive inundation!

So with detailed—and yes, repetitive—assurance, God assures them, with a formal covenant no less, that He will never do it again. And He begins by getting their attention: “Behold,” that is, *Pay attention, I am about to declare something important.*

**Read Genesis 9:8-11.**

## THE COVENANT

### vv8-10

First, God establishes the originator and the parties involved in this covenant. “As for Me... I establish”; by this we know that God Himself, and *by Himself*, established this covenant. As to the other parties involved, He makes that clear as well:

**“...I establish My covenant with you and with your seed after you;**

This promise is being made to every human being emerging from the ark, and to every one of their descendants. But He doesn't stop there.


**...and with every living creature that is with you, the birds, the cattle, and every beast of the earth with you; of all that comes out of the ark, even every beast of the earth.”**

God vows the same to every member of the animal kingdom; I think the last phrase of the verse is His way of repeating the same promise to the animals that He made to the humans—that is, “and with your seed after you.”

Now we know the parties involved in this covenant. Verse 11 gives us the meat of the covenant itself.

### v11

**“Indeed I establish My covenant with you; and all flesh shall never again be cut off by the water of the flood, and there shall never again be a flood to destroy the earth.”**

Most of us are well aware of the prophetic fact that in the end times God will utterly refashion this globe in ways not unlike what happened during the Inundation in Genesis. During the end times, millions of human souls will be killed, as well as millions of beasts and fish and fowl. The last half of the Tribulation especially will be a period of horrific destruction and death. And after all that, what little is left of this earth will be removed and replaced by a brand new earth (Revelation 21:1).  This means that God will indeed one day in the future destroy this earth and a substantial portion of the human and animal population.

God in the Genesis covenant, however, is not saying He will never again destroy the earth. He is saying that He will never again destroy it *by means of water*. Smaller-scale floods will occur, but never again will humanity, animal life be wiped out and the earth remade universally, globally by means of a flood.

One of the best arguments to refute the position that this “new” earth (in Revelation 21) will be just the old one cleaned up, is found in Isaiah 65:17-19. The Hebrew word translated “create” in that passage is *bara* (lit., br), which always refers to divine creativity, and means something from nothing—not something from something else. As we see in Revelation 20:11, everything that was before—*everything*—has now passed away. Gone. There is nothing left from which to build something else.

I can imagine this brought profound peace to the minds of those in Noah's family. In our secure apathy we may slough off this promise, as those who have never lived through such a calamity; but to Noah this would have brought immeasurable relief—and confidence, moving forward into a reinvigorated life.

*Alexander MacLaren:* We have said that the one thing needful for Noah was some assurance that the new order would last. He was like a man who has just been rescued from an earthquake or a volcanic eruption. The ground seems to reel beneath him. Old habitudes have been curled up like leaves in the fire. Is there to be any fixity, any ground for continuous action, or for labour for a moment beyond the present? Is it worth while to plant or sow? Men who have lived through national tempests or domestic crashes know how much they need to be steadied afterwards by some reasonable assurance of comparative continuity. And these men, in the childhood of the race, would need it much.

### Read Genesis 9:12-17.

#### THE SIGN

God continues to give. Now, in addition to the covenant that obligates only Him, God gives both man and Himself a visual reminder that the covenant will always be in effect.

#### v12-13

**Then God said, "This is the sign of the covenant which I am giving to be between Me and you and every living creature that is with you, for all successive generations; I put My bow in the cloud, and it shall be for a sign of a covenant between Me and the earth."**

Just a few thoughts that flow out of this passage. First, this bow (v13)—"rain-bow"; a bow associated with rain—is God's; it is His idea, He created it, it belongs to Him. ➡ Second, v12 includes a subtle reference to the fact that the preservation of the animals is ultimately for the benefit of man: "every living creature that is **with you.**" Of course there are those in our midst for whom this is a strong, daily truth. For others, here is a reminder that the beasts serve for food, for sacrifice, even for work. Which raises the thought-experiment: *Would God have created the beasts if He had not created man?*

Here in Chapter Nine God calls it only a "bow." But the prophet Ezekiel refers to it as a "rainbow," likening it to the radiance around Yahweh's throne (Ezekiel 1:28). The apostle John, too, in The Revelation, uses "rainbow" to describe the same setting (Revelation 4:3; 10:1).

Third, the phrase “all successive generations” or “perpetual generations”—Leupold: “to generations of eternity”—means that the covenant is to remain in effect as long as the earth remains. Finally, it can be no accident that this “sign of the covenant” is placed between earth and the third heaven. Just as we look up to recognize the glory of God in a beautiful sunset or sunrise painted across the sky, we look up to see the glory of God in His majestic bow. It is necessary for mere humans to have frequent reminders to look up, and away from this fallen world. Delitzsch, especially, waxes poetic as he considers this sign.

*K&D*: The fact that the rainbow, that “coloured splendour thrown by the bursting forth of the sun upon the departing clouds,” is the result of the reciprocal action of light, and air, and water, is no disproof of the origin and design recorded here. For the laws of nature are ordained by God, and have their ultimate ground and purpose in the divine plan of the universe which links together both nature and grace. “As the rainbow shines forth against a dark background which but shortly before flashed with lightnings, it symbolizes the victory of bright, gentle love over the darkly luminous wrath; growing as it does out of the interaction of sun and dark clouds, it symbolizes the readiness of the heavenly to interpenetrate the earthly; extending from heaven to earth, it proclaims peace between God and man; reaching, as it does, beyond the range of vision, it declares that God’s covenant of grace is all-embracing.” (Delitzsch).

#### **vv14-15**

**“And it will be, when I bring a cloud over the earth, that the bow will be seen in the cloud, and I will remember My covenant, which is between Me and you and every living creature of all flesh; and never again shall the water become a flood to destroy all flesh.”**

The noun “cloud” here is a bit confusing. It is rightly translated “a cloud” (except in the ESV and NIVs) because it is indeed a singular noun; but the Hebrew word *anan* includes the idea of a cloud *mass*, even heavy mist. So we might rightly paraphrase this as “a cloud situation,” or “a cloud event”—i.e., a thunderstorm.

And as we all know well, the bow generally does not appear during the thick of the rain storm, but only once it has spent its wrath and the clouds are beginning to disperse—which is perfect timing for it to demonstrate its initial, God-created purpose.

The rainbow is not party to the fierce wrath of the storm, but is the evident grace of the peaceful aftermath.

God in Genesis has just wiped out all of unbelieving humanity and all of the animal kingdom save for those in the ark; He has dramatically reshaped the planet by means of the rending of its mantle to release the destructive force of the water. He has forcefully expressed His wrath against mankind's persistent sin.

Now God assures Noah and his family that this was a one-off; He establishes a covenant—a promise—that He will never do the same again. And the bow in the sky is to be the sign of that promise. Still today, when the natural elements of God's design align themselves so, the bow in the clouds is revealed, and both we on earth and its Maker are reminded of His promise made so long ago.

We are often made uncomfortable by any suggestion—coming even from His own lips—that God might “forget” something, which in human terms is a concomitant part of *remembering* something. But here it just means that He “recalls to mind.” Or as Leupold puts it, “a divine activity whereby His ‘covenant terms’... will be vividly before Him, and man may take joy from the fact that God thus thinks upon what He promised.” Just as it is for us. I doubt that anyone on earth, having once seen a rainbow, literally forgets that they exist. Rather, when we see one again we think to ourselves, *How beautiful! I haven't thought about rainbows for some time, and how good it is to be reminded once again of God's covenant.*

By the way, I love what Leupold says about something that I expressed in our last session—again regarding the repetition in this passage. After reading it myself at home, and after a member of our class read this passage last week, I remarked, “Talk about your repetition.” Well, it *is* repetitive, but why? Leupold sets us straight:

One may disregard the situation and man's need of definite assurance and regard the whole promise as exceedingly verbose; or else one may rightly claim, with Delitzsch, that these words are like blows of the hammer, which makes the whole more firm and impress it more deeply.

**“So the bow shall be in the cloud, and I will look upon it, to remember the everlasting covenant between God and every living creature of all flesh that is on the earth.” And God said to Noah, “This is the sign of the covenant which I have established between Me and all flesh that is on the earth.”**

God reiterates His promise to drive it home one last time. And it is hard not to translate this covenant and its central promise into our lives today as followers of Christ Jesus—especially in the context of this week’s horrific, fiery destruction in California.

When one whittles down the narrative of Chapter Nine to its essentials—indeed, the narrative which began back in Chapter Six, where God sets the scene for the impending Inundation and His plan for saving a remnant (which He always does) of humanity and the animals through the destruction—when one searches for the essential lesson of this event, one cannot help but think about the security the believer has in Christ.

Whether it be the loss of a loved one, a family home torn apart by a tornado or hurricane, a flood that washes away everything we know and love, or a holocaust burning through entire communities; or maybe even a momentary descent into sinful behavior—whatever the personal cataclysm in a life, Christians are in possession of a strong, dependable, life-saving promise.

**He who indeed did not spare His own Son, but delivered Him over for us all, how will He not also with Him graciously give us all things? Who will bring a charge against God’s elect? God is the one who justifies; who is the one who condemns? Christ Jesus is He who died, yes, rather who was raised, who is at the right hand of God, who also intercedes for us. Who will separate us from the love of Christ? Will affliction, or turmoil, or persecution, or famine, or nakedness, or peril, or sword? Just as it is written, “FOR YOUR SAKE WE ARE BEING PUT TO DEATH ALL DAY LONG; WE WERE COUNTED AS SHEEP FOR the SLAUGHTER.” But in all these things we overwhelmingly conquer through Him who loved us. For I am convinced that neither death, nor life, nor angels, nor rulers, nor things present, nor things to come, nor powers, nor height, nor depth, nor any other created thing, will be able to separate us from the love of God, which is in Christ Jesus our Lord. (Romans 8:32–39)**

Let me close with something more from MacLaren.

*Maclaren:* [The Rainbow] 'fills the sky when storms prepare to part,' and hence is a natural token that the downpour is being stayed. Somewhere there must be a bit of blue through which the sun can pierce; and the small gap, which is large enough to let it out, will grow till all the sky is one azure dome. It springs into sight in front of the cloud, without which it could not be, so it typifies the light which may glorify judgments, and is born of sorrows borne in the presence of God. It comes from the sunshine smiting the cloud; so it preaches the blending of love with divine judgment. It unites earth and heaven; so it proclaims that heavenly love is ready to transform earthly sorrows. It stretches across the land; so it speaks of an all-embracing care, which enfolds the earth and all its creatures.

# SESSION 56

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### The Covenant: vv8-11

Revelation 21:1 states that God will indeed one day in the future destroy this earth and a substantial portion of the human and animal population. God in the Genesis covenant, however, is not saying He will never again destroy the earth. He is saying that He will never again destroy it *by means of water*. Smaller-scale floods will occur, but never again will humanity and animal life be wiped out and the earth remade universally, globally by means of a flood.

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