

Promises We Can Count On

Session 2

June 9, 2024

God's Promise of Preservation

The Point: God promised to preserve His creation.

Session Passage: Genesis 9:1-13

The Setting. The account of the flood (Gen. 6–9) begins when God saw the wickedness of all humanity and determined to destroy them (6:5-7). However, Noah alone found favor with God (v. 8). God commanded Noah to build an ark by which Noah, his family, and the animal species would be preserved through the flood. Noah obeyed God (vv. 13-22). Noah, his family, and the animals entered the ark, and God poured out the flood upon the earth and all life was destroyed (chap. 7). The waters receded and just over a year after the rain began, Noah left the ark and built an altar to worship God. God then made a covenant with Noah (chap. 8–9).

Genesis 9:1-3

Connection to the Point. God's promise to preserve His creation is seen in the restating of His call for us to be fruitful and multiply.

Blessed (v. 1). "To 'bless' meant to fill with benefits, either as an end in itself or to make the object blessed a source of further blessing for others."¹ While in a sense God blesses all people (ex., sending sunshine and rain on all, Matt. 5:45), God pours out His blessings most fully in Christ. Those who repent and put their faith in Him as their Lord and Savior have all their sins forgiven (Rom. 4:7-8), are reconciled to God (5:10-11), and become children of God (Gal. 3:26; 4:7) and citizens in the kingdom of God (Eph. 2:19).

Noah and his sons (v. 1). God blessed Noah as He had the first man and woman (1:28, the Adamic covenant). Adam had violated the first covenant through his sin (chap. 3). In this new covenant (the Noahic covenant), Noah served as the head of the human race. Noah and his descendants were the ones through whom God would bless humanity and ultimately through whose lineage the Messiah would be born (Luke 3:23-38). They also served as God's covenant representatives (stewards) who would act on His behalf in relation to God's creation.

Be fruitful and multiply and fill the earth (v. 1). Prior to the flood, God had told Noah it was His intention to destroy every living creature on the earth, but also to preserve representatives of humanity and all the animal species through the flood on the ark (7:1-3). Right before God commanded Noah to disembark from the ark after the flood the Lord had stated His intention that all the creatures on the ark should repopulate the earth (8:17; see 1:22). Now God commanded Noah and his sons to be fruitful, multiply, and repopulate the earth (see 1:28).

Fear and terror (v. 2). Similar to the Adamic covenant, God reaffirmed humanity's dominion over the animal kingdom. However, the nature of this dominion changed significantly. God had commanded the first man and woman to subdue and rule over His creation (1:26,28), and they had apparently lived in harmony with all creatures. After the flood, God placed all animal life under Noah's authority. Moving forward instead of humanity living in harmonious co-existence with the animal kingdom, that relationship would now be characterized by *fear* and *terror*. The two Hebrew terms are similar in meaning. *Fear (mora)* can refer to terror, respect, or reverence, depending on the context. *Terror (chath)* describes extreme dread. Every living creature would now fear humanity.

Placed under (v. 2). It is God who determined the relationship of humanity to all the creatures on the earth. The Hebrew term (*nathan*) means to be given.

Authority (v. 2). The term (*yad*) literally refers to the hand and figuratively means having control or power over, in the possession of, or care.

Every creature . . . will be food for you (v. 3). Here is one of the most significant differences between the Adamic and Noahic covenants. God had blessed the first man and woman with every seed-bearing plant and the fruit of every seed-bearing tree for food (1:29-30). This was also the source of food for all wildlife (vv. 29-30). God blessed Noah in a similar manner in providing food for him and his family. However, after placing all animal life under Noah's (humanity's) authority, God told Noah that the animals would now be a source of food for him. Some believe that this verse indicates that people did not eat meat before the flood. However, Scripture does not specifically state this. What is known for sure is that this statement is the first mention of God's explicit approval of eating meat.

I gave . . . I have given (v. 3). Whether it is acknowledged or not, God is the ultimate Source of all blessings, including His provision for humanity's sustenance.

Genesis 9:4-7

Connection to the Point. In addition to reestablishing the call for us to be fruitful, God also reaffirmed our role as His image-bearers. Therefore, we are to join Him in preserving the lives of others.

However (v. 4). Just as God had placed a stipulation on the Adamic covenant (2:16-17), God also placed a stipulation upon His provision of animals for food.

You must not eat meat (v. 4). This prohibition uses the exact Hebrew wording God spoke to Adam regarding the tree of knowledge (translated in both passages "you must not eat"; see 2:17). This command necessitates the draining of the blood from the meat after the animal is killed (Deut. 12:16,24).

Lifeblood (v. 4). The term comes from two Hebrew words. The first (*nephesh*) literally means "breath" (Gen. 1:30). It is also used to refer to a living being (1:20), life (9:5) people (12:5), the self (Num. 30:2,4,5), and the heart in the sense of the seat of desires and emotions (Gen. 34:8). The second word (*dam*) literally refers to the blood in a human's or animal's body. Figuratively, it refers to bloodshed. Blood equals life and is sacred because God is the Giver of life and human beings are made in God's image (Gen. 9:6). This prohibition foreshadows the Mosaic covenant's sacrificial system of temporary atonement through animal sacrifice (Lev. 17:11) and Christ's ultimate sacrifice under the new covenant for complete atonement on the cross. The writer of Hebrews declared that without the shedding of blood, there is no forgiveness of sin (Heb. 9:22). In the upper room at the Last Supper, Jesus took the cup and told the disciples it represented His blood which established the new covenant (Matt. 26:27-28; Mark 14:22-24; Luke 22:20). The blood of Jesus shed on the cross provides complete atonement for sin for all who repent and place their faith in Him (Rom. 3:23-25; 5:9; Eph. 1:7; Heb. 9:11-14).

Require a penalty for your lifeblood (v. 5). Three times in this verse, God said, "I will require" (*darash*) emphasizing that there will be an accounting to God for anyone taking a human life. That accounting extends to animals as well as humans (see Ex. 21:28-32). *Lifeblood* is a translation of the same two Hebrew terms mentioned in the previous verse. In this context, it refers to the blood which leads to a person's death when it is shed.

From any animal . . . from any human (v. 5). The sacredness of human life requires the penalty be enforced whether the culprit be another person or an animal.

If someone murders a fellow human (v. 5). The literal translation of the Hebrew (*ach*) is "his brother." As one commentator observed, "murder is fratricide [the killing of one's brother or sister] by virtue of the inherent covenant all people have with God as created in his 'image.' We are to that fundamental degree all brothers and sisters in that we are all human."²

I will require that person's life (v. 5). God expanded on the sacredness of life in verse 5. The value of something is most often determined by what it costs; in this case, a life costs a life (Lev. 24:17). There are no exceptions. (Later, the law rejected monetary compensation for the murder of a human being [v. 17; Num. 35:31].) God's judgment in this context

is a far-reaching general condemnation of the taking of human life (murder). He specifies no conditions concerning how the taking of a life occurs, whether someone uses a weapon or not, nor is a motive mentioned. These issues are addressed later in the Mosaic law (vv. 9-34).

Whoever sheds human blood (v. 6). To further emphasize the sacredness of human life, God repeats the theme from the last part of verse 5. The punishment applies to anyone who intentionally takes a human life. Additionally, *whoever* emphasizes this penalty applies equally to all persons, regardless of their stations in society—regarding both the offender and the victim. It applies equally to the slave or the freeman, family, friend, or foe.

By humans his blood will be shed (v. 6). A new era of time began after the flood. While there is no explicit mention of murder in Genesis 6, it is reasonable to infer that the taking of life was a frequent occurrence in the pre-flood world. Most likely, the total wickedness and corruption of humanity that led to God's decision to wipe humanity off the face of the earth (6:5-13) included such reckless disregard for human life. Scripture describes how Cain murdered his brother, Abel (4:1-16), and Lamech killed two people and boasted about his crime (vv. 23-24). Instituting a death penalty for murder might have, in some ways, discouraged a quick return to the complete wickedness that occurred before the flood. More importantly, it served as a reminder of the sacredness of human life in the post-diluvian (post-flood) world. Murder, which is the shedding of the victim's blood, requires the shedding of the murderer's blood.

God made humans in his image (v. 6). Disregarding human life insults God as the One who gives life. To strike against one made in God's image is to attack God Himself and usurps God's role as humanity's Judge. Nowhere in Scripture is what it means to be made in the image of God precisely defined. There are a variety of diverse opinions but none are conclusive. Suggestions include humanity's psychological, moral, and spiritual aspects; humanity's ability to relate to, fellowship with, and serve God; and humanity having been set apart to subjugate and rule over God's creation as His representatives. Despite the varying opinions, what is generally agreed upon is that this distinction sets humanity apart from all other creatures which God created.

But you (v. 7). God now refocused on His purpose for Noah and his family.

Be fruitful and multiply; spread out over the earth and multiply on it (v. 7). This is a repetition of God's command to Noah in verse 1. It also foreshadows the tower of Babel incident in Genesis 11 where Noah's descendants rebelled against God's command to spread throughout the earth. For fear of being "scattered throughout the earth" humanity attempted to establish a single civilization in the valley of Shinar (11:2-4).

Genesis 9:8-13

Connection to the Point. This covenant is not just with humanity but with all creation. God will not destroy in this manner again.

Understand (v. 9). The Hebrew term (*hinneh*) is used to emphasize an idea or bring attention to a detail.

I am establishing (v. 9). God is the originator and actor in this covenant. The Hebrew term for *establishing* (*qum*) means set up or restore. The term is used twice in these verses (vv. 9,11). The first time God declared He was establishing His covenant with Noah, his descendants, and all the living creatures preserved on the ark. In verse 11, God stated that He was establishing His covenant specifically with Noah (who is now the head of the human race). In one sense, God's covenant with Noah is new. God promised never to destroy all living creatures by a flood. In another sense it is also a renewal of a portion of the Adamic covenant. Like Adam and Eve, Noah and his family are to be fruitful, multiply, and fill the earth (vv. 1,7; see 1:28).

My covenant (v. 9). Covenants are basically agreements between two parties, in this instance between God and humanity and every living creature (the Noahic covenant).³ This covenant is unconditional. God promised to never again destroy all life on earth through a worldwide flood. Interestingly, the reason for the flood was the wickedness and

corruption of humanity (as well as all creatures, 6:5-7,11-13). But this covenant God made with Noah, his descendants, and all creation was made even though human nature had not changed. “When [after the flood] the LORD smelled the pleasing aroma [of Noah’s sacrificial offering], he said to himself, ‘I will never again curse the ground because of human beings, even though the inclination of the human heart is evil from youth onward. And I will never again strike down every living thing as I have done’ ” (8:21).

With you and your descendants after you, and with every living creature that is with you (vv. 9-10). Because the Noahic covenant is unconditional, there was nothing Noah and his family had to do for God to fulfill this promise. While considered a covenant with Noah, it also includes Noah’s sons and all future generations. They are the ones who would be responsible for repopulating the earth. Additionally, while God announced His intentions to make this covenant before the flood (6:18-20), He did not enact His covenant until after the flood subsided.

Never again (v. 11). When God first spoke to Noah, it was to inform him of His intention to destroy every living thing on the face of the earth (6:13). God now gave His unconditional promise never to do this again by a flood (9:11). These words are repeated twice for emphasis. It is important to note God does not promise to never destroy the earth again; the promise is specific to destruction by a worldwide flood. The destruction of the earth on the Day of the Lord when God will destroy the world by fire (2 Pet 3:10-12) will not violate God’s covenant with Noah.

Sign of the covenant (v. 12). Another aspect of covenants is they included signs. The Hebrew term (*oth*) refers to a figurative or literal mark or a symbol (ex. a flag, beacon, monument, etc.) that communicates something, in this case a reminder of the covenant God had made with Noah and all the inhabitants of the earth, both humans and animals.

I am making between me and you and every living creature with you (v. 12). God initiated this unconditional covenant. The parties to this covenant are God on one side, and Noah, his descendants, and all living creatures, as well as the earth itself, on the other side.

A covenant for all future generations (v. 12). God’s covenant with Noah will be in effect for as long as human and animal life exists on the earth.

I have placed (v. 13). God also designated a sign on the earth as a reminder of His covenant promise that He would never again destroy all life through a flood.

My bow (v. 13). The sign of the *bow* confirms the Noahic covenant. The term (*qesheth*) appears three times in this chapter (vv. 13,14,16), always in connection with “clouds.” Some have questioned whether it had ever rained before the flood. Scripture does not address this issue. In any case, after the flood the rainbow was more than just a phenomena created by sunlight reflecting off of raindrops producing an arch of colors in the sky. God declared it to be the sign He placed in the heavens by which He acknowledged the covenant He made with Noah and all life. The rainbow reminds humanity about the flood and what led to God wiping out all life on earth save for Noah, his family, and the animals on the ark.

A sign of the covenant between me and the earth (v. 13). The language here is similar to verse 12. However, here God summarized His covenant as being between Him and *the earth*. In this context, *the earth* refers to Noah, his descendants, and every living creature on the earth (vv. 12,15,16,17). The sign of the rainbow would serve to both remind people of God’s judgment on sin (destruction of the earth by flood) and His mercy in the midst of judgment (delivering Noah, his family, and all the creatures on the ark).

1. E. Ray Clendenen, “Blessing and Cursing,” in *Holman Illustrated Bible Dictionary* [HIBD], gen. ed. Chad Brand, rev. (Nashville, TN: Holman Reference, 2015), 225–226.
2. Kenneth A. Mathews, *Genesis 1–11:26*, vol. 1A, *The New American Commentary* (Nashville, TN: Broadman & Holman, 1996), 404.
3. Stephen J. Wellum, “Covenants,” in HIBD, 355–360.