

Genesis 9 – The Covenant

“So God blessed Noah and his sons, and said to them: “Be fruitful and multiply and fill the earth.”

Originally, the Lord had said to Adam, be fruitful and multiply and subdue the earth. Now there is no mention of subduing, for man, as a slave to sin, became incapable of defeating Satan. The post-flood circumstances were quite different.

Physically, the earth had lost its protective outer water canopy and thus men would live much shorter lives. The once tropical environment changed dramatically. For as long as the earth remains, there would be hot and cold – that is, adverse weather would be the norm.

The ‘rules’ changed as well – from now on, it would be blood for blood. Man’s naturally evil character would have to be kept in check. With capital punishment and much shorter life spans, sinful mankind would not totally destroy itself before God’s plan of salvation ‘kicked in’.

And just living, just surviving in the new adverse conditions would take a lot more work. Nevertheless, God’s blessing was to be fruitful. Adversity did not stop fruitfulness. In fact, for the church, adversity is the very thing that nurtures fruitfulness and spiritual health. It drives us to a dependence on the Lord and purges us from insincerity.

“Whoever you are -- rich, poor; young, old; pious, impious -- you will encounter hardships! The only time troubles will cease is when you are in the grave (and then if you are not a believer, your troubles are just beginning). Let me take this a step further: life is continually difficult for the Christian. “Accept Christ and everything will be fine!” sounds good but is simply not true. We have all met fine Christians who are going through tough times. Some are battling disease, some gut-wrenching family problems, other financial straits. Accepting Christ is no guarantee against calamity.”

“No matter what your level of involvement in Christian activity or ministry, you will be subject to difficulties and trials. Friends will sometimes forsake you. Families will fail you. Heartache will be a

regular part of your life. In fact, dedication to Christ often brings us face to face with more problems than if we lived for ourselves. If some of the great Christians in the history of the church had aimed lower, they would not have experienced such an incredible variety of sorrows -- and would not have been used mightily by God.” (Hughes)

“And the fear of you and the dread of you shall be on every beast of the earth, on every bird of the air, on all that move on the earth, and on all the fish of the sea. They are given into your hand.”

For the first time, the animals had a dread of man. What’s tragic is that man must rule everything he rules by fear. Not only is the dread or fear of man upon the animal kingdom but upon unregenerate men as well. *“The fear of man brings a snare, but whoever trusts in the Lord shall be safe.”* Prov 29:25

When we live in fear of what men think about us, we are slaves to fear, to the opinions of men. The scriptures teach us time and again to reverence God - to care far, far more what He thinks than the sinful perspectives of man.

“Frederick the Great once called all his generals together. One of them, Hans Von Zieten, had duties to perform at his church that night and a Communion to participate in, so he refused to come. Later he was again invited to dine with all the generals and Frederick the Great. On that occasion they all made light of him and joked about his religious duties and about the Lord’s Supper. Von Zieten stood and said to his intimidating ruler, “My lord, there is a greater king than you, a king to whom I have sworn allegiance, even unto death. I am a Christian man, and I cannot sit quietly as the Lord’s name is dishonored, His character belittled, and His cause subjected to ridicule. With your permission I shall withdraw.” There was silence because the generals knew such a daring act could mean death. But Frederick the Great was so struck by Von Zieten’s courage that he begged him to stay and promised him he would never again demean those sacred things.” (Hughes)

The fear of man is indeed a snare, a net used to bind you up in the world’s standards and preoccupations. We, however, are to turn that around.

The Lord has given us a net as well. It is to proclaim the good news of the Gospel boldly, to live a life of love for God and our neighbor, to bear one another's burdens, and so on. Quite a different net from the world's; our blessed 'net' is a rescue net, a lifeline to bring men into the glorious presence of God, to free them from the world's bondages.

Peter, a man who was very caught up in the cares of this life, was pulled into the Lord's boat with such a net and became a fisher of men.

“So it was as the multitude pressed about Him (Jesus) to hear the word of God, that He stood by the Lake of Gennesaret (Galilee), and saw two boats standing by the lake; but the fishermen had gone from them and were washing their nets. Then He got into one of the boats, which was Simon's and asked him to put out a little from the land. And He sat down and taught the multitudes from the boat.”

“When He had stopped speaking, He said to Simon, “Launch out into the deep and let down your nets for a catch.” But Simon answered and said to Him, “Master, we have toiled all night and caught nothing; nevertheless at Your word I will let

down the net.” And when they had done this they caught a great number of fish, and their net was breaking. So they signaled to their partners in the other boat to come and help them. And they came and filled both the boats, so that they began to sink.”

“When Simon Peter saw it, he fell down at Jesus' knees saying, “Depart from me, for I am a sinful man, O Lord!” For he and all who were with him were astonished at the catch of fish which they had taken; and so also were James and John, the sons of Zebedee, who were partners with Simon. And Jesus said to Simon, “Do not be afraid. From now on you will catch men.” So when they had brought their boats to land, they forsook all and followed Him.” Luke 5:1-11

“Every moving thing that lives shall be food for you. I have given you all things, even as the green herbs. But you shall not eat flesh with its life, that is, its blood.”

As we mentioned in an earlier chapter, it is interesting that God identified the clean and unclean animals before the flood, but here there were no dietary restrictions. Perhaps the need for repopulation drove this. In any event, this new

life in a new world is also picturesque of the spiritual equivalent - salvation. For those who have been born again, Paul wrote, *“Therefore let us not judge one another anymore, but rather resolve this, not to put a stumbling block or a cause to fall in our brother's way. I know and am convinced by the Lord Jesus that there is nothing unclean of itself; but to him who considers anything to be unclean, to him it is unclean. Yet if your brother is grieved because of your food, you are no longer walking in love. Do not destroy with your food the one for whom Christ died.”* Rom 14:13-15

What remained paramount in importance was (and is) the blood. This is because the scripture tells us that life is in the blood - the Blood of Christ. It was never to be taken in as common food.

This was to establish in the mind of man the value, the sanctity, and the holiness of the blood of God's Lamb. Knowing this, Jesus taught however to seemingly do just the opposite when it came to His body. It scandalized His Jewish listeners because they did not understand the spiritual significance. *“The Jews therefore quarreled among*

themselves, saying, “How can this Man give us His flesh to eat?” Then Jesus said to them, “Most assuredly, I say to you, unless you eat the flesh of the Son of Man and drink His blood, you have no life in you. Whoever eats My flesh and drinks My blood has eternal life, and I will raise him up at the last day. For My flesh is food indeed and My blood is drink indeed. He who eats My flesh and drinks My blood abides in Me, and I in him. As the living Father sent Me, and I live because of the Father, so he who feeds on Me will live because of Me...From that time many of His disciples went back and walked with Him no more.” John 6:52-57,66

So what did He mean? Are we looking at cannibalism? Just how can anyone today have eternal life?

The key is simply to believe - to take into oneself the life and the death of Jesus - the blood is the life and the flesh is the death. Take it in such that it becomes part of you - that is, it's not something external - a religious show, a costume of piety, a mask. Rather, it is deep within, that is, you believe and accept it with all your

heart. You believe in the atoning, life-giving blood Christ shed for all our sins and you appreciate the death He suffered.

Now, you may think, 'But the Word says so often that we are cleansed or washed by the blood of the Lamb. If we take it in, how does it wash us?' Think about that - what is cleansed? The inner man! The flesh or outer man is still under sin (Rom 7:25).

As for His death, not only do we appreciate it, but we share in it. *"Or do you not know that as many of us as were baptized into Christ Jesus were baptized into His death? Therefore we were buried with Him through baptism into death, that just as Christ was raised from the dead by the glory of the Father, even so we also should walk in newness of life. For if we have been united together in the likeness of His death, certainly we also shall be in the likeness of His resurrection, knowing this, that our old man was crucified with Him that the body of sin might be done away with, that we should no longer be slaves to sin. For he who has died has been freed from sin...Likewise you also, reckon yourselves to be dead indeed to sin,*

but alive to God in Christ Jesus our Lord." Rom 6:3-11

"Surely for your lifeblood I will demand a reckoning; from the hand of every beast I will require it, and from the hand of man. From the hand of every man's brother I will require the life of man.

Whoever sheds man's blood, by man his blood shall be shed; For in the image of God He made man

And as for you, be fruitful and multiply;

Bring forth abundantly in the earth and multiply in it."

Remember the old pre-flood world was filled with violence. Life became very cheap. And there was no effective system of justice as far as we know. In the new world, righteousness was to be enforced with capital punishment - at least in regards to the value of life.

In like manner, during the millennium, when Christ rules the world in absolute righteousness, the Word says He will rule it with "a rod of iron" (Ps 2:9, Rev 2:27; 12:5; 19:15). That doesn't imply cruelty,

it implies sternness and unyielding adherence to the ways of God.

"Then God spoke to Noah and to his sons with him saying: "And as for Me, behold, I establish My covenant with you and with your descendants after you, and with every living creature that is with you; the birds, the cattle, and every beast of the earth with you, of all that go out of the ark, every beast of the earth. Thus I establish My covenant with you: never again shall all flesh be cut off by the waters of the flood; never again shall there be a flood to destroy the earth."

It's difficult to overemphasize the power and the comfort of this covenant to these folks. Being separated from the scene by several thousand years, we lose some of the import. The entire old world was gone. Even the landscape and environment was radically changed. People usually don't like change. And this was more than change, it's an overhaul, with new ground rules.

God's promise was meant to nurture in man a confidence and trust towards the Lord and a hope for the future. Without this, Noah and the boys could easily have

become the new world's first franchise - 'Arks R Us'. Everyone would have had an Ark in their backyard just in case. The public schools would have included Ark-drills once a month. You get my meaning.

Looking forward to the last days, we know that the world will be remade one more time. It won't, however, be with a flood but with a fire. The Apostle Peter wrote, *"But the day of the Lord will come as a thief in the night, in which the heavens will pass away with a great noise, and the elements will melt with fervent heat; both the earth and the works that are in it will be burned up. Therefore, since all these things will be dissolved, what manner of persons ought you to be in holy conduct and godliness, looking for and hastening the coming of the day of God, because of which the heavens will be dissolved, being on fire, and the elements will melt with fervent heat? Nevertheless we, according to His promise, look for new heavens and a new earth in which righteousness dwells."*

2 Pet 3:10-13

Now, this is a compelling consideration, for unlike a flood,

you can't float a boat on top of fire. You can't prepare a physical safeguard. It's all going to burn.

For the Christian, Peter makes it clear that we can look forward to this - it's not a terror but a tremendous promise. We can look forward to the new world.

For those who are not born again in Christ, the future is completely vain. Everything treasure people strive for in this world will literally disappear in a huge explosion of fire.

You know, the Bible says that it's Christ Who holds the elements, the universe, together (see Col 1:17). Scientists know this as the force that literally holds the nucleus of every atom together. They acknowledge it, this awesome power, but it remains a mystery. It's the force behind nuclear explosions.

Imagine, Christ will one day, at the appointed time, simply 'let go' and every atom in the physical creation will explode in a nuclear fire. When that happens, the only things which will survive will be those works done for the Lord, according to His

will for they are stored up, if you would, in heaven.

“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: I set My rainbow in the cloud and it shall be for the sign of the covenant between Me and the earth. It shall be, when I bring a cloud over the earth, that the rainbow shall be seen in the cloud; 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. 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. “ 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.””

As pretty as the rainbow is, it's not primarily for man; it's for God. It's a reminder of His covenant. He doesn't say, "You will remember..." He says, "I will look on it to remember..." Why does God need this? Let me suggest that it is the vehicle whereby He can have mercy

together with His holiness. Understand, God is holy and His holiness requires absolute righteousness; it's part of His character. Man can never measure up to this standard, no way.

Therefore, as man sinks deeper and deeper in sin, God in His holiness is angry with sin, He cannot tolerate it as He watches it destroy us. Yet in His mercy, He restrains Himself and does not give us what we deserve though we stubbornly continue in sin. How wonderful that His mercy is from everlasting to everlasting (see Psa 136).

Now, Jesus is the ultimate expression of the balance tension - both God's righteous indignation - for sin had to be dealt with, and it was on the cross - and His mercy - He paid the price Himself for our evil hearts.

Rather than giving us what we do deserve, He gave us what we don't deserve. He made a way back into His presence. Jesus Christ, the Son of God and God the Son.