

The Covenant With Noah Pt. 1

Genesis 9:1-11 (selected verses)

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Genesis 9:1 God blessed Noah and his sons and said to them, “Be fruitful and multiply and fill the earth. 2 The fear and terror of you will be in every living creature on the earth, every bird of the sky, every creature that crawls on the ground, and all the fish of the sea. They are placed under your authority. 3 Every living creature will be food for you; as I gave the green plants, I have given you everything. 4 However, you must not eat meat with its lifeblood in it. 5 I will require the life of every animal and every man for your life and your blood. I will require the life of each man’s brother for a man’s life.

6 Whoever sheds man’s blood, his blood will be shed by man, for God made man in His image. 7 But you, be fruitful and multiply; spread out over the earth and multiply on it.”

8 Then God said to Noah and his sons with him, 9 “Understand that I am confirming My covenant with you (Gen. 6:18) and your descendants after you, 10 and with every living creature that is with you—birds, livestock, and all wildlife of the earth that are with you—all the animals of the earth that came out of the ark. 11 I confirm My covenant with you that never again will every creature be wiped out by the waters of a flood; there will never again be a flood to destroy the earth.”

Intro

We don’t have to wrestle with the question of whether or not God made a covenant with Noah. The inspired text says so in the plainest terms possible. Before the flood God spoke to Noah and said, “I will establish My covenant with you,” (Gen. 6:18), and here in today’s text, following the flood, he says, “I confirm My covenant with you” (9:9,11). The question for most of us, then, is that of relevance. Why should we care about a covenant God made with Noah some 4,500 years ago?

I hope to answer that in a moment, but for now I will only say this; A proper understanding of the covenant God established with Noah, combined with faith in it, will bring about a deep-seated peace and hope—a peace you cannot know any other way. Furthermore, it should help you come to a fundamental understanding of God’s purpose for your life. I do not mean that it will help you to decide upon a career, or whom to marry. Rather, understanding God’s covenant with Noah (in which all of us were included), will help you to understand your purpose as a human being.

But before we dive into Genesis 9, I have to say a word or two about the flood itself. It is not my purpose this morning to try to *prove* the science of a world-wide flood (although I believe that can be done). Nevertheless, I assure you that a worldwide flood is what the Bible teaches—Old Testament, New Testament, Jesus and the apostles—with one voice every division of God’s Word affirms the reality and significance of the worldwide flood.

The Flood's Significance

And what is the flood's significance? The covenant with Noah cannot be separated from the events that made it necessary. In other words, the covenant with Noah makes no sense if it is not based upon a worldwide flood that actually destroyed all life outside the ark. So let's take a moment to be sure we all agree on what the Bible actually teaches about the flood.

- Notice the universal nature of God's confession and promise at the end of Genesis 8.

God's confession of universal destruction

Genesis 8:20 Then Noah built an altar to the Lord. He took some of every kind of clean animal and every kind of clean bird and offered burnt offerings on the altar. 21 When the Lord smelled the pleasing aroma, He said to Himself, "I will never again curse the ground because of man, even though man's inclination is evil from his youth. And I will never again strike down every living thing *as I have done*."

Either this last statement refers to a universal, worldwide flood, or else it makes God a liar. How?

Three possibilities regarding the flood

1. No flood at all, Genesis 1-11 is total myth.
2. Local flood, with the possibility that all humans then living died. (Hugh Ross)
3. Universal worldwide flood in which all life outside the ark perished.

We won't even dignify #1 with a discussion. But here's the problem with position #2. Since God spoke the words recorded in 8:21 there have been innumerable local floods, and many of them have been horribly destructive. If God did promise to never again allow local floods, then that promise has been broken too many times to count.

But that, of course was not what God promised. The only thing that makes sense in this context is that God promised to never again destroy the earth with a worldwide flood, as He had just done. In my view there is no escaping the fact that the Bible teaches a worldwide flood in which all life outside the ark perished. Our challenge is simply to believe it.

God's universal promise

Genesis 8:22 "As long as the earth endures, seedtime and harvest, cold and heat, summer and winter, and day and night will not cease."

This verse by itself eliminates the possibility that Noah's flood was local, and only later exaggerated into the concept of a universal flood, as author Hugh Ross and other modern compromisers would have it. Note that God did not say, "As long as Mesopotamia endures, that area alone will regularly enjoy four seasons per year along with 24-hour circadian oscillations (day and night)." No! He made a universal promise to the whole earth that beautifully balances the universal destruction He had just unleashed.

- Then we have this summary of the flood in Genesis 7. This is the description of the flood at its height.

Genesis 7:19 Then the waters surged even higher on the earth, and all the high mountains under the whole sky were covered. 20 The mountains were covered as the waters surged above them more than 20 feet (two stories). 21 Every creature perished—those that crawl on the earth, birds, livestock, wildlife, and those that swarm on the earth, as well as all mankind. 22 Everything with the breath of the spirit of life in its nostrils—everything on dry land died. 23 He wiped out every living thing that was on the surface of the ground, from mankind to livestock, to creatures that crawl, to the birds of the sky, and they were wiped off the earth. Only Noah was left, and those that were with him in the ark.

As one scholar has put it in reference to this passage, “Just suppose, for the sake of the argument, that God had wanted to teach a global Flood—how could He have said it more clearly than in Genesis 7?” (Jonathan Sarfati, *Refuting Compromise*)

We can rest assured that the Bible teaches a world-wide flood that eliminated all life outside the ark. And I would add that the flood also rearranged world geography, geology, biology and climate to such an extent that the earth’s ancient past cannot be understood without factoring in its comprehensive effects.

Earlier I said I was not going to try to prove the science behind a worldwide flood, and I still won’t. But I do have to say this. A couple of months ago I had the privilege of meeting Dr. Paul Withey, currently professor of astrophysics at the University of Houston. He told me that he had previously spent 20 years on a team of scientists working for NASA, specifically tasked with studying the origin of our solar system. “In all that time,” he said, “nothing I learned has forced me to reject a literal interpretation of the book of Genesis.”

Meaning of the flood

1. The message of the flood is judgment. Genesis 6 tells us that because of man’s thoroughgoing wickedness God was grieved to the point of regretting he’d even made the human race. Speaking in the first person, God said, “I will wipe off from the face of the earth mankind, whom I created, together with the animals, creatures that crawl, and birds of the sky” (Gen. 6:7).

A few weeks ago I said a study of the Biblical covenants would test your faith like nothing else. When I said that, the flood was one of the issues I had in mind. But I was also thinking of the spiritual challenge contained in the covenants. Ask yourself, do you agree that at the time of the flood God had a perfect right to judge His creation and punish it in any way He saw fit? In other words, does God have the right to define sin and set its penalties? Think carefully before you answer. Rejection of God’s right to judge is a hallmark of our time, and the spirit of our age too often affects believers and non-believers alike.

As you think about this challenge, please keep this in mind; if you reject the idea of judgment you are rejecting God’s right to be God. And while you’re thinking about that, consider this. If

God is not allowed to be the God of judgment, then He cannot be the God of grace and mercy either. A God who must love, cannot love.

We love to sing that God has “the whole world in His hands. And the thought that God has “the tiny little baby in His hands” always blesses us. But that same song includes a verse that says He has the gambling man, the lying man, and the sinning man in His hands. What do you think He has them in His hands for? Both aspects of God’s nature are true, love and judgment (justice), and God is to be praised for both. More to the point, God’s judgment is to be feared and His mercy is to be sought.

Dear friends, the first message of the flood is that God is a God of judgment and that we ignore this fact to our eternal peril. For He who judged the earth and destroyed it 4,500 years ago speaks of another time, yet future, when the earth will be destroyed by fire and all our works disclosed (II Peter 3:1-12). It strikes me that if we reject the legitimacy and reality of worldwide judgment in Noah’s day we are perilously close to doubting the coming judgment. And I have to ask, “Is that really a bet you want to make?”

Meaning of Noah

2. If the message of the flood is judgment, then the message of the life of Noah is grace and favour. “Noah found favour in the sight of the Lord” (Gen. 6:8). Noah was a man of faith who walked in obedience with God. This is affirmed in Genesis (6:9) and in the New Testament (Heb. 11:7). And because Noah found favour with God, he saved his family and became an heir of the righteousness that comes by faith.

Heb. 11:7 By faith Noah, after he was warned about what was not yet seen and motivated by godly fear, *built an ark to deliver his family*. By faith he condemned the world and became an heir of the righteousness that comes by faith.

Conclusion: The message of Noah and the flood still speaks to us today. When God told Noah how to build the ark He made sure to instruct him to put a door in the side (Gen. 6:16). Then, when it was time, God told Noah to enter through the door, along with His family and all the animals. And when they were all safely in, we’re told that “the Lord shut him in” (Gen. 7:16).

In the New Testament Jesus speaks of another door of safety, Himself. “I assure you that I am the door of the sheep,” Jesus says in John 10:7. “I am the door. If anyone enters by Me, he will be saved.” We enter into Jesus by faith, and when we do we find that in Him God’s justice has been satisfied and His love is poured out upon us. We’re safe in Him through the floods of life and death.