

Genesis 9:8-17  
 Psalm 25:1-9  
 1 Peter 3:18-22  
 Mark 1:9-15



### BEHOLD, I ESTABLISH MY COVENANT WITH YOU

A *Covenant* usually has several defining elements: (1) an agreement of all parties involved, (2) something to be done (or not done) by each party, (3) a way to uphold and enforce the agreement, (4) the term of the agreement, and (5) a tangible record of the agreement. In our lesson today one of the parties is God; nevertheless, his covenant with Noah and his sons has these five properties.

Gen 9:8-17. *Then God said to Noah and to his sons with him, <sup>9</sup>“Behold, I establish my covenant with you and your descendants after you, <sup>10</sup>and with every living creature that is with you, the birds, the cattle, and every beast of the earth with you, as many as came out of the ark. <sup>11</sup>I establish my covenant with you, that never again shall all flesh be cut off by the waters of a flood, and never again shall there be a flood to destroy the earth.” <sup>12</sup>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 all future generations: <sup>13</sup>I set my bow in the cloud, and it shall be a sign of the covenant between me and the earth. <sup>14</sup>When I bring clouds over the earth and the bow is seen in the clouds, <sup>15</sup>I will remember my covenant which is between me and you and every living creature of all flesh; and the waters shall never again become a flood to destroy all flesh. <sup>16</sup>When the bow is in the clouds, I will look upon it and remember the everlasting covenant between God and every living creature of all flesh that is upon the earth.” <sup>17</sup>God said to Noah, “This is the sign of the covenant which I have established between me and all flesh that is upon the earth.”<sup>1</sup>*

- *“I establish my covenant with you and your descendants after you, and with every living creature ...”* (v.9). This identifies (1) the parties involved in the covenant. God’s covenant was not only with Noah. It was also his promise to *every living creature*, that life on earth would never again be destroyed by a flood. This was a wonderful promise. It was the dawn of the age of hope. Before the flood, men lived in an atmosphere of hopelessness. The Bible says, *“The Lord saw that the wickedness of man was great in the earth, and that every imagination of the thoughts of his heart was only evil continually”* (Gen 6:5). These people were hopeless. People who hope for a better life to come do not imagine or think this way.

What do you imagine today? Do you believe death is the end? Jesus Christ said to the Sadducees, *“You know how to interpret the appearance of the sky, but you cannot interpret the signs of the times.”* (Matt 16:3). For believers, signs are everywhere. God has placed his bow in the clouds. Every spring brings renewal of life. He has planted seeds of eternity in your mind (Eccl 3:11). And he has raised Jesus Christ from the dead. Of all creatures, man alone is able to choose whether to “see” these *signs of the times*.

Today, those of us willing to trust God’s promises do not live in anticipation of death, because death is not the end. Our hope is in the words of Scripture: *“... for the creation was subjected to futility, not of its own will but by the will of him who subjected it in hope; because the creation itself will be set free from its bondage to decay and obtain the glorious liberty of the children of God. We know that the whole creation has been groaning in travail together until now; and not only the creation, but we ourselves, who have the first fruits of the Spirit, groan inwardly as we wait for adoption as sons, the redemption of our bodies”* (Rom 8:18-23). When you receive Jesus Christ, death and hopelessness have lost their grip on your life.

- *“Never again shall all flesh be cut off by the waters of a flood”* (v.11). This addresses elements (2-4) of the covenant agreement above, and of course the rainbow (v.12-17) is element 5, the “tangible record.” The wording in v.11 raises two questions. According to the words of the covenant,

<sup>1</sup> Bible quotations are from the RSV unless otherwise noted.

- (1) If men become evil again as in the days of Noah, could God could “cut off all flesh” from the earth by some other means?
- (2) As long as some people are righteous, will God refrain from destroying those who are evil?

Regarding (2), recall Abraham’s conversation with the Lord (Gen 18:23ff), in which the Lord began, “*If I find at Sodom fifty righteous in the city, I will spare the whole place for their sake.*” This is far from answering “yes” to (2), but it does show that God intends to protect the lives of the righteous. Similarly, we have the parable in Matt 13:24-30, where weeds are allowed to remain with the wheat until harvest time.

Both questions are relevant because, although the hearts of men today are not “*evil continually*” (Gen 6:5), our days are nevertheless not unlike the days of Noah. Jesus said, “*As were the days of Noah, so will be the coming of the Son of man. For as in those days before the flood they were eating and drinking, marrying and giving in marriage, until the day when Noah entered the ark, and they did not know until the flood came and swept them all away, so will be the coming of the Son of man*” (Matt 24:37-39).

Regarding questions (1) and (2), consider also the following passages:

Ezek 14:12-20 (NIV). *The word of the Lord came to me: “Son of man, if a country sins against me by being unfaithful and I stretch out my hand against it to cut off its food supply and send famine upon it and kill its men and their animals, even if these three men – Noah, Daniel and Job – were in it, they could save only themselves by their righteousness, declares the Sovereign Lord....”*

This passage provides a definite answer to (2), which is upheld in the NT as well:

2 Pet 2:4-10. *For if God did not spare the angels when they sinned, but cast them into hell and committed them to pits of nether gloom to be kept until the judgment; if he did not spare the ancient world, but preserved Noah, a herald of righteousness, with seven other persons, when he brought a flood upon the world of the ungodly; ... then the Lord knows how to rescue the godly from trial, and to keep the unrighteous under punishment until the day of judgment, and especially those who indulge in the lust of defiling passion and despise authority.*

Scripture never describes God as one who excuses and glosses over unrighteousness. He will never abide with sin. But scripture does describe God as one who loves, and understands, and forgives those who turn to him in faith. He loves you now, just as you are. He is willing to redeem you, just as you are, as shown in Isaiah’s prophecy of what God would accomplish by giving the life of his Son:

Isa 54:4-10. *“Fear not, for you will not be ashamed; be not confounded, for you will not be put to shame; for you will forget the shame of your youth, and the reproach of your widowhood you will remember no more. <sup>5</sup>For your Maker is your husband, the Lord of hosts is his name; and the Holy One of Israel is your Redeemer, the God of the whole earth he is called. <sup>6</sup>For the Lord has called you like a wife forsaken and grieved in spirit, like a wife of youth when she is cast off, says your God. <sup>7</sup>For a brief moment I forsook you, but with great compassion I will gather you. <sup>8</sup>In overflowing wrath for a moment I hid my face from you, but with everlasting love I will have compassion on you, says the Lord, your Redeemer.*

*<sup>9</sup>“For this is like the days of Noah to me: as I swore that the waters of Noah should no more go over the earth, so I have sworn that I will not be angry with you and will not rebuke you. <sup>10</sup>For the mountains may depart and the hills be removed, but my steadfast love shall not depart from you, and my covenant of peace shall not be removed, says the Lord, who has compassion on you.*

On the cross our Lord cried out with a loud voice, “*My God, my God, why hast thou forsaken me?*” (Matt 27:46). He was forsaken because he took on my sin, and yours, and the sin of all mankind. He felt the way many of us feel because of sin – forsaken by God. Many believe he actually *was* forsaken by God at that time, which would agree with the words of Isaiah (v.7-8 above), “*For a brief moment I forsook you ...*”

But the very next words are, “*... but with great compassion I will gather you.*” In *overflowing wrath* (v.7), God has every reason to hide his face from sin forever and thus cut off all flesh as he did in the days of Noah, but he has chosen instead in his *overflowing love* to redeem us through the cross of Jesus Christ.

Will you respond today, and receive Christ as your Savior? God’s new covenant comes to us in a spirit of mercy, grace, and forgiveness, as in his covenant with Noah: “*... “My steadfast love shall not depart from you, and my covenant of peace shall not be removed, says the Lord, who has compassion on you.”*”