

#03: Covenant of Preservation - Noah

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...that which now has been inaugurated under Noah. Note the similarity of wording in the charge to Noah and his family in Genesis chapter nine verse one. One and you might be putting your finger in Genesis chapter one verse 28 at the same time.

At the conclusion of the flood, Genesis 9:1, "God blessed Noah and his sons and said unto them, 'Be fruitful and multiply and replenish the earth.'" And verse seven of that same chapter, "And, you, be ye fruitful and multiply. Bring forth abundantly in the earth and multiply therein." And if you turn back to Genesis chapter one verse 28, "And God blessed them," this is man first created, "and said unto them, 'Be fruitful and multiply and replenish the earth and subdue it.'"

So that here we see that these words reflect exactly the language of creation and its mandate given to man to regard and to take seriously his responsibility to multiply and to bring into being a whole culture that will be honoring to the Lord.

It is most important in this regard for us to realize that the God of creation is the God of redemption. And the same charge given to man prior to the fall is the charge given to man after the fall. The implications of this particular doctrine extend *ad infinitum*.

You know nothing, I am sure, most of you know nothing of the Christian Labor Association of Canada which is an effort to bind together men who will do the work of their hands to the glory of God. You know a little bit of the Christian school movement in America which is an effort to see that the education of man is created and done to the glory of God. We need to see the organization of Christians together for the sake of art.

Why is it that we as Christians can compose religious songs and think only of singing church hymns? Why is it that we as Christians cannot also...why cannot we also compose love songs? Is there not a distinctive way in which man and woman fall in love and become one together in Christ as over and against the way in which they come to one another and fall in love outside of Christ?

Young people, let me encourage you to seek avenues of expression of your own particular view of even the most basic things of life.

Now, a second distinctive of the covenant with Noah may be found in the word "particularity," the particularity of the application of the redemptive covenant.

Preluding the flood we notice the description of man found in Genesis chapter six verses five through seven. “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. And it repented the Lord that he had made man on the earth and it grieved him at his heart. And the Lord said, ‘I will destroy man whom I have created from the face of the ground.’”

Here we have a description of the intensity of the evil of the human race subsequent to its fall and this development to the period of Noah. God sees that the wickedness of man is so great that every imagination—and the phrase here means that the front impulse of every thought, that impulse that precedes thinking is only evil continually. There is none that knows or none that seeks after God whatsoever.

Now notice the immediately succeeding verse, verse eight. “But Noah found grace in the eyes of the Lord.” Here is the particularity of the redemptive work of God. Out of this mass of humanity that is depraved in its every thought, Noah finds grace in the eyes of the Lord. Now, you who have a little Arminian strand in you and all of us do, may look for a little comfort in verse nine. The immediately following verse, “These are the generations of Noah. Noah was a righteous man and perfect in his generation.”

So, you see, it is very obvious, isn’t it? That’s why Noah found grace in the Lord, he was a righteous man. And so first he became righteous, then he found grace. But notice that between that little comforting phrase, “Noah was a righteous man,” the first phrase of verse nine, “These are the generations of Noah.”

Now I hope some day when reformed scholars retranslate the Bible they will also rearrange the paragraphs and the chapters of the Bible. And between verse eight and verse nine there should be a paragraph and even a chapter. For this little phrase, “These are the generations of...” runs throughout the book of Genesis in which the author himself has said, “This is where I wish to start a new chapter. And it says, “I am going to begin dealing with a particular topic now.”

If you notice, for instance, Genesis chapter two verse four. The critical scholars constantly are saying we have two different and much divergent creation narratives in Genesis chapters one and two and they completely misunderstand the purpose of the writer. Notice Genesis 2:4 as he records this distinctive chapter. “These are the generations of the heavens and the earth.”

First he has given a panorama of the beauty of God’s creative work. Now these are the generations of... This is what the earth has produced.

Now we have in Genesis 6:9, “These are the generations of Noah.”

Now if you look at Genesis chapter 10 verse one, “These are the generations of the sons of Noah.”

If you look at Genesis 11:27, “These are the generations of Terah,” the father of Abraham.

In Genesis 25:19, “These are the generations of Isaac.”

So, you see, we have a very definite chapter break concept and sorry to disappoint your Arminian indications or feelings. You cannot seek help from this particular phrase that Noah was a righteous man. It is because Noah found grace in the eyes of the Lord that he was a righteous man. This term חַנּוּן (khane) or “grace” symbolizes the covenantal, unmerited favor of God.

Genesis chapter six verse eight is the Noahic equivalent of Ephesians two verses eight through nine, “For by grace are you saved through faith and that not of yourselves. It is the gift of God, not of works lest any man should boast.”

A third principle inherent in the establishment of the covenant with Noah is God’s intention to deal with families in his covenant relationships. I am not going to construct grammatically these words here. We are just picking out a key word. Family.

God will destroy all the earth. God will wipe away the whole of his creation, but to Noah he says, if you look at Genesis chapter six verse 18, Genesis 6:18, “But I will establish my covenant with thee and thou shalt come into the ark, thou and thy sons and thy wife and thy son’s wives with thee.”

The covenant is not with your wives or your sons, but it is with you. But all of them, all of your family will come into the ark. And this theme is constantly repeated both prior to, in the course of and subsequent to the flood.

If you will just notice very quickly these phrases, chapter seven verse one, “The Lord said unto Noah, ‘Come thou and all thy house into the ark.’”

Genesis seven verse seven, “And Noah went in and his sons and his wife and his son’s wives with him into the ark.”

Verse 13 of chapter seven, “In the self same day entered Noah and Shem and Ham and Japheth, the sons of Noah and Noah’s wife and the three wives of his sons with them into the ark.”

And verse 23, “Every living thing was destroyed and Noah only was left and they that were with him in the ark.”

Chapter eight, again, verse 16. “Go forth from the ark, thou and thy wife and thy sons and thy son’s wives with thee.”

Of course Noah is going to go out and his wives are going to follow him, his wife and his sons and his son's wives are going to follow him. But God is specifically pointing out, you see, the family, the family, the family is the redemptive unit.

Chapter eight verse 18. "And Noah went forth and his sons and his wife and his son's wives with him."

Again, chapter nine verse nine, "And behold, I establish my covenant with you and with your seed after you."

Quite obviously this family basis for covenant dealings has had a most significant role throughout the history of God's redemptive purposes.

One of you just told me recently of a most interesting fact that secular sociologists uncovered. A certain man named Jonathan Edwards, they discovered, had a very great progeny. And they noted that from the progeny of Jonathan Edwards came more ministers, more doctors, more college presidents, more men of prominence than almost any family that they could find.

Then someone read something very interesting in the diary of Jonathan Edwards. Jonathan Edwards said, "I shall pray for my sons and for my grandsons and for my great grandsons and for my great great grandsons."

Pray for your children. Pray for your grandchildren. Pray for your great grandchildren if the Lord should tarry. God will hear. God will answer and God will deal with you in the family relationship.

Some come to Christ when they are ancient in their own lives. They have nothing left to offer they feel in so many senses, but they have a family that they can offer. They have a descendancy that they can offer. If you will claim the promises of God, you and your children unto the third and fourth generation, God has given to you his promise.

Fourthly, the covenant with Noah, primarily, is a covenant of preservation. And this is the most important aspect of the covenant with Noah.

The mention of the Noahic covenant becomes most evident in the response of God to the thank offering of Noah and in the subsequent provisions if you look at Genesis chapter eight verse 21 and 22. "Noah built an altar to give thanks to God and the Lord smelled a sweet savor and the Lord said in his heart, 'I will not again curse the ground anymore, for man's sake for that the imagination of man's heart is evil from his youth. Neither will I again smite any more everything living as I have done while the earth remaineth, seed time and harvest and cold and heat and summer and winter and day and night shall not cease.'"

By this decree God binds himself to the preservation of the earth in its present world order until the time of the consummation. God shall preserve the earth.

In some respects if you look at this verse, verse 21, it seems that we have something of a *non sequitur*, something that doesn't seem to follow logically. God says, "Man's heart is evil from his youth and therefore I will not curse the ground anymore."

You might think that if God saw that man's heart was evil from his earth he would say, "Well, therefore I will wipe out the human race. There is no hope." But, no, God is intent on providing a cure for the disease of man's youth. If, then, an appropriate cure to this problem is to be supplied, the earth must be preserved free of devastating judgments such as the flood or [?].

This pledge to preservation predominates the covenant with Noah. And, if you will note most specifically, the awesome word found in Genesis chapter nine verses five and six. "And surely your blood, the blood of your lives will I require at the hand of every beast will I require it, at the hand of man, even at the hand of every man's brother will I require the life of man. Whoso sheddeth man's blood, by man shall his blood be shed. For in the image of God made he man."

These severe words concerning the execution of a manslayer may appear to have...to be quit inappropriate in the context of the gracious sign of the rainbow. However, they play a most prominent role in the preservation aspect of the covenant with Noah. If the degeneration character of man is to be stopped short of total self destruction, adequate curves to the advancement of wickedness must be erected. In the wisdom of God a major curve to the over pouring wickedness is to be found in the terror of the sword placed by God in the hands of man by himself. Placing all men under the domain of his common grace, God institutes the temporal power of the state as his instrument in the insistent necessity of controlling evil.

This power of the sword, now for the first time being placed in the hands of man by God clarifies the potential evildoer and restrains his constant activity of wickedness.

If you notice, Genesis chapter nine verse two, "The fear of you and the dread of you shall be upon every beast of the earth." And compare Romans chapter 13 verses three and four, "For rulers are a terror not to good works, but to the evil. For he is a minister of God an avenger for wrath to him that doeth evil."

Now it is quite common to deny to the covenant of Noah any reference to the practice of capital punishment. However inherent in such a denial is a refusal to recognize the Genesis character of Genesis.

Where did capital punishment arise in the history of man? Does it have any divine sanction whatsoever under any circumstances? Is it completely the invention of a depraved man assuming to himself the prerogative which belongs only to God? When Moses institutes capital punishment is he simply borrowing from the practices of the heathen nations about him?

The narrative of Noah defines in no uncertain terms the genesis of capital punishment. The practice had its first beginning in the mind of God. It was communicated to man for his own good and is divinely sanctioned just as fully as the commandment, "Thou shalt love thy neighbor as thyself."

A word here may be said concerning the false belief and concept of pacifism, that man may somehow, someday end wars among nations. God has instituted and placed in the hands of the state this sword and righteous wars must be carried on by a nation.

In any case, the preservative character of the covenant with Noah should be noted with care. Men today still live under the provisions inaugurated in the covenant with Noah. The regularity of the seasons derive directly from God's determination to preserve the earth until a solution to the sin of man could be provided.

It is here that we must stop for a moment and appreciate the awesome significance of a Word of God [?] others. We must not be duped into awesome worship of the calculations of man that made him able to put a man on the moon and bring him back again. If God had not spoken to this one man, Noah, this word of preservation to order the course of the universe, all of man's efforts would have been all together in vain. It is the Lord God who preserves the laws of his universe.

We notice, fifthly, concerning the covenant with Noah, the covenant with Noah may be characterized in some aspects as a universal covenant.

We have an element of particularity in the application of redemption. We have a universal aspect in the covenant of Noah also. The uniqueness of the covenant with Noah should be noted in this particular regard. The whole of the created universe including the totality of humanity is beneficiary of part of this particular covenant. Not only Noah, but every living creature according to Genesis nine verse 10 lives under the sign of the rainbow. This inclusion of the totality of the universe in God's covenant dealings finds vivid recognition in Paul's expression concerning the final expectation of the redeemed if you will look at Romans chapter eight verses 22 and following.

This particular passage emphasizes that the whole of the universe is involved in this particular covenant. Romans 8:22 and following. "We know that the whole creation groaneth and travaileth in pain together until now, waiting for our adoption, to wit, the redemption of our bodies."

Often the question is asked: Why hurricanes? Why is this terrible devastation brought upon the earth? We see in such phenomena the quaking, the groaning of the world, seeking that day of its redemption also.

This universal character of the covenant with Noah provides the foundation for the universal offer of the Christian gospel. Here is where true Christian universalism arises. To every creature, go into all the world and preach the gospel.

The apostle Peter makes quite plain how to interpret the long delay of Christ's return. Scoffers may mock his promise to consummate all things, willfully forgetting that God already at the time of the flood once has brought about a consummation. Instead of us quibbling about the Lord's delay, all men everywhere should accept with gratitude the gracious delay of the consummation knowing that, "The Lord is not slack concerning his promise as some count slackness, but is longsuffering to you ward, not wishing that any should perish, but that all should come to repentance."

We know that, sixthly, the seal of the covenant with Noah emphasizes the gracious character of the covenant.

In a context of threatening judgment symbolized by the bloated rain cloud, God designates the overarching beauty of the rainbow to depict his great end judgment. Having once destroyed the world thereby depicting the immutability of his righteous decrees, the Lord God now couples the cloud with the rainbow to manifest his free and unmerited grace.

It is no accident—if you look at Revelation chapter four verse three—to see that the throne of the righteous judge of heaven and earth is depicted in Revelation as having a rainbow round about the throne. What a joy it should be the true sharer in the grace of Jesus Christ to know that about that place of his final appointment is the symbol of the grace of God.

To summarize, then, the covenant with Noah, we see that the covenant with Noah provides the historical framework in which the Emmanuel principle may reach its full realization. God has come in judgment, but he also has provided a context of the common grace of preservation in which the special grace of redemption may operate. From the covenant with Noah it becomes quite obvious that God's being with us involves not only an outpouring of his grace on his people, but also an outpouring of his wrath upon the seed of Satan.

Shall we close with a word of prayer?

We give thanks, gracious God and heavenly Father, for your power to preserve. That from the beginning you are the Creator, the Sustainer and the Redeemer of your people. Grant that we, oh merciful heavenly Father, may look to Jesus Christ as the source of grace and the giver of every good and perfect gift. Help us in the time that is allowed to us to seek refuge in the provision of God which has come in the fulness of times. For we ask these things in Christ's name. Amen.