

The Covenant in the Time of Noah

Genesis 6:9–19, 9:8–17; Westminster Confession of Faith 7.3–4

Studies in Covenant Theology #5

© 2016 Daniel R. Hyde

“**I** LOVE you.” Are there any more powerful words in the English language? And we love to hear them, don’t we? Husbands and wives tell each other, parents tell their children, we tell our family members, and I hope, you say it to each other as brothers and sisters in Christ. But it’s one thing to say it and quite another to show it. We help our kids not only to say they love each other but to show it with hugs, with playing with each other, with helping each other.

One of the great ways we see the love of God for the things and the people he’s made is in his covenants. God, out of his infinite love, made the world and us to share life and love with us. And he entered into a covenant with Adam that would lead to everlasting life if he was obedient. But Adam sinned. God again showed his love by withholding judgment on Adam and Eve and instead pouring it out on animal sacrifices that Adam and Eve might

be clothed. And now we come to the story of the Flood and the covenant in the time of Noah.¹

And without getting too technical, let me say that in today's covenant debates some say the covenant in this time of Noah is the covenant of grace only while others say its a common grace covenant only.² These are unnuanced in my opinion. The covenant in the time of Noah is rooted in the covenant of grace but it is not identical with the covenant of grace.³ It is a covenant made with all humanity, restraining the curse, providing the space needed for God's redemptive work to be accomplished. It serves the covenant of grace.⁴ One writer said this covenant was the foundation upon which the church would be built.⁵

The Continuation of Redemptive Grace

As we look at the covenant in the time of Noah the first thing you need to see is that this is *the continuation of redemptive grace*.⁶ We saw in Genesis

¹ Remember that the covenant of grace extends in its **Old administration** from Adam to Christ and in its **New administration** from Christ to consummation. And the Old administration is further divided into the time of promise before the law from Adam to Noah, from Noah to Abraham, and from Abraham to Moses, and then in the time under the law from Moses to Christ. See Turretin, 2:218; Witsius, 1:313-324.

² Horton, 113-119; Rhodes, 46-53.

³ Bavinck, 3:218.

⁴ van Genderen and Velema, 547.

⁵ Schilder cited in van Genderen and Velema, 547.

⁶ See Witsius, 2:129-141.

3:15 the spiritual war between the serpent's seed and Eve's seed. And as we come to Genesis 6 it looks like the serpent is winning:

The LORD saw that the wickedness of man was great in the earth, and that every intention of the thoughts of his heart was only evil continually. And the LORD regretted that he had made man on the earth, and it grieved him to his heart. So the Lord said, "I will blot out man whom I have created from the face of the land, man and animals and creeping things and birds of the heavens, for I am sorry that I have made them." (Gen. 6:5-7 cf. 6:11-13)

Last year when I coached Cyprian's team I could tell in less than five minutes how we were going to do. How? Their body language expressed their bad attitude if it was going to be a bad game and their body language expressed their good attitude if it was going to be a good game. Humanity's attitude is terrible and their actions followed in those days! It was about as bad as it gets! I mean, we look at what's going on today with ethnic strife, lawlessness, and corruption all over the world and we begin to get a sense of what the world was like in the days of Noah.

And then we read, **but Noah found favor in the eyes of the LORD** (6:8), that **Noah was a righteous man, blameless in his generation,** and **Noah walked with God** (6:9). Noah hoped in the promise of salvation in Genesis 3:15 and he would offer hope to all who knew him. If you go back to Genesis 5:28-29 you'll see that his father named him Noah because "**out of**

the ground that the LORD has cursed”—he’s quoting from the Lord’s words in Genesis 3—**“this one shall bring us relief from our work and from the painful toil of our hands.”** Noah’s name means rest or comfort. And as we read elsewhere in Scripture, he was a “preacher of righteousness” (2 Peter 2:5). Noah’s hope was evidenced in his life. And then we read the command to build an ark (6:14–17) and in the midst of it we read,

For behold, I will bring a flood of waters upon the earth to destroy all flesh in which is the breath of life under heaven. Everything that is on the earth shall die. But I will establish my covenant with you, and you shall come into the ark, you, your sons, your wife, and your sons’ wives with you. (Gen. 6:17–18)

Notice that the covenant is not merely a covenant of common grace for all creation as the Lord “establishes” his covenant with Noah. I mentioned before that word “establish” is used in the Old Testament to express the continuation of a covenant already made. And when a covenant is made it is described as being “cut.” So the covenant of grace the Lord “cut” with Adam and Eve in the animal skins was now being continued with Noah. And then after flooding the earth we read that **God remembered Noah** (Gen. 8:1).

The Establishment of “Common” Grace

After reading of the Noah and his family entering the Ark, the Lord’s flooding the earth, and the receding of the waters in chapter 7–8:19, we read

of the establishment of “common grace.” It’s interesting how Noah’s Ark is a cultural thing too, isn’t it? It’s on the conscience of humanity. I watched one of those doomsday movies recently in which the earth was going haywire and entire seas were flooding over the Himalayas. And what did the nations of the world do to prepare? They build several arks! Children, why did the Lord save the animals? The answer is that he was making provision for the continuation of the world’s existence in 8:21–22:

And when the LORD smelled the pleasing aroma, the LORD said in his heart, “I will never again curse the ground because of man, for the intention of man’s heart is evil from his youth. Neither will I ever again strike down every living creature as I have done. While the earth remains, seedtime and harvest, cold and heat, summer and winter, day and night, shall not cease.”

The way we’re acting these days we don’t deserve life! Elder Danny mentioned another murdering of police officers in New Orleans just this morning. But God has made a covenant to preserve the earth and the humanity in the earth. Look also in chapter 9. After **God blessed Noah and his sons** (9:1) he gives them the same “cultural mandate” he gave to Adam and Eve in Genesis 1 and 2: **“Be fruitful and multiply and fill the earth...And as I gave you the green plants, I give you everything”** (9:1, 3

cf. 9:7). Noah and his family would be “the nucleus of a second humanity.”⁷ I was never great at science but that means they are the center of something new! Even the death penalty in verses 4–6 was meant to ensure the propagation of life, as if mass murderers were not dealt with there would’ve been no humanity after Noah!

And notice the universal language of the covenant in verses 9–10: **“Behold, I establish my covenant with you *and your offspring after you and with every living creature that is with you, the birds, the livestock, and every beast of the earth with you, as many as came out of the ark; it is for every beast of the earth.*”** This covenant was **“that never again shall all flesh be cut off by the waters of the flood, and never again shall there be a flood to destroy the earth”** (9:11). The sign of this covenant **between me and you and every living creature that is with you, for all future generations** (9:12) was what we call the rainbow (9:13). Why? God hung up his war bow of vengeance and would never again flood the earth in judgment. And how amazing is it that the rainbow is not so much for us to remember but for God—using human language for God as if he “remembers” like we do: **“When I bring clouds over the earth and the**

⁷ Bavinck, 3:217.

bow is seen in the clouds, I will remember my covenant that is between me and you and every living creature of all flesh” (9:14–15).

What a God! He has a special grace and love for his people. And he even has a common grace and love for all people. Let us worship him!