

BEGINNINGS: Lesson Nine,
Creation: The Beginning of Life Under Covenants
Genesis 9:1-17

Subject: God blessed Noah with fruitfulness, food, government, and a covenant.

Main Idea: God offers the direction and assurance we need.

Principles:

1. *Those who look to God are blessed with purpose in life and principles of order.*
2. *God's promises are intended to assure us.*

Introduction

A growing awareness of mental health and the recent war against terrorism fought by the United States have brought the issue of post-traumatic stress to the forefront in American culture. War is not the only catalyst for post-traumatic stress. It can develop after exposure to any psychologically traumatic event. Severe anxiety resulting in sleeplessness, flashbacks, depression, explosive anger, and addictions is not uncommon.

When Noah and his family stepped off the Ark, they stepped onto a barren, lonely planet. Movies portraying a small band of survivors following a nuclear holocaust are the closest glimpse any of us will probably get to imagine what they faced. No human being could experience what Noah and his family had without trauma. Noah must have had many questions once he stood on firm soil again. Would any of the routine, structure, or order of life with which he had lived for 600 years before the Flood remain? How would he and his family survive in this “new world”? The earth looked different – would it still produce food? Would the basic principles of nature even be the same? And what were God’s plan and expectations for His Creation after the Flood? Noah must have been overwhelmed.

You may not have experienced post-traumatic stress; I hope you never will. But all of us have had crises of one sort or another that have left us feeling overwhelmed. When I am feeling overwhelmed, I need clear direction about the first steps to take. It can be difficult to know where to start. I also need encouragement – some reassurance that I will get through my situation. God’s first words after Noah came off the Ark show how greatly Noah needed assurance and direction. We’ve discovered that the early chapters of Genesis teach us much about God. Genesis 7-8 tell of God’s grace in saving Noah. In chapter 9, we see God’s grace in offering Noah direction and assurance. *God gave Noah’s family basic direction in the form of a new world order and a covenant (a promise) to reassure him.* Chapter 9 begins with a description of the new world order.

I. **Order for the New World** – Genesis 9:1-7

A. Assured the Continuity of Life – 9:1: God commanded Noah and His sons, “Be fruitful, increase in number, and fill earth.” Assurance that life would continue is implicit in the command. Despite mankind’s wickedness, God had not abandoned His purpose to allow life to flourish on earth. Although the planet, no doubt, seemed barren and even foreign to Noah’s family, it would once again be a place where life would thrive. It is the same blessing that was given to the animals (1:22) and Adam (1:28) at their creation. Now, Noah was the “new Adam” and his sons would repopulate the earth. Thus, Noah’s sons were strategic in God’s plan and included in His blessing. Since Noah was a descendant of Seth, the line of Sethites continued, and with it, the protevangelion (protevangelium) promise of God to send a Deliverer (Genesis 3:15). Since no one since the time of Noah has survived anything of the magnitude of the Flood, we cannot imagine how deeply this small band of people needed such an assurance. It has been said that one thing people cannot live without is hope. God assured them that they had not been spared only to come to a childless end. Humanity would not die off. God had a plan, and they were part of this plan. Their main mission was to repopulate the earth.

B. Mission Aided by the Fear of Animals – 9:2: Secondly, Noah and his sons were told that fear and dread of them would fall on all animal life and that all animal life was given into their hands.

- i. A Change or Not? Before the Fall, Adam’s relationship with the animals was friendly and peaceable (2:19-20). Although the animals’ fear of mankind may have resulted from the Fall, the animals on the Ark were certainly not a threat to Noah’s family. It is possible that God was telling Noah that the peaceful relationship he and the animals had enjoyed on the Ark would not continue, and that pre-Flood animosity would return. Or perhaps the implication was that animals would fear man for the first time. If the animals’ hadn’t feared humans before the Flood, this change would have surprised Noah’s family.
- ii. Protection for Noah’s Family: Whether or not a change from the antediluvian world, the animals’ fear actually protected Noah’s family. Since many of the carnivorous the animals could reproduce more quickly than Noah’s family (and in some cases easily overpower them) without any fear, they could have easily overtaken the small human family.ⁱ ⁱⁱ The animals’ fear also made them subservient to humans for practical uses. Oxen and horses plow our fields and bear our burdens, goats and cows give us their milk, sheep their wool, etc.ⁱⁱⁱ God’s command to Noah to repopulate the earth and His protection from the animals ensured Noah that human life would continue.

- C. Guaranteed an Available Food Source – 9:3-4a:** Whether or not people ate meat prior to the Flood, God now gave them formal permission to do so, with one exception: they were not to eat meat with blood in it.
- i. For human protection: The prohibition was for human protection, guarding against degeneration into barbaric practices, such as eating animals while they are still alive.^{iv} Some pagan traditions have encouraged the drinking of blood, believing that they are drawing in the strength of the dead victim. Whether or not this practice existed in Noah’s time is unknown, but not impossible, especially in light of the pre-Flood depravity. The prohibition also served as a sanitary and safety measure, since meat with the blood drained preserves for longer.
 - ii. For human education: God twice refers to “lifeblood” (9:4, 5). Blood symbolizes life. Later, Moses used blood to consecrate Aaron and his sons, their altar, and God’s covenant people (Exodus 24:8; 29:16, 20). Removing the blood from meat before eating it was a sign of respect for the sanctity of life, as still observed today by Orthodox Jews and any who keeps a “kosher” diet (based on the prohibition in Leviticus 17:10-14). Although Noah’s family was free to kill and eat animals, the prohibition against blood reminded them that *all* life was still valuable to God. Noah and his family were thus blessed with freedom to eat meat, and equally blessed by the one prohibition. They were assured that in the new world order, life would continue and a food source would be available. Then, God reaffirmed the value of human life to Noah’s family in yet another way.

D. A Basis for Civil Government – 9:4b-6

- i. The Death Penalty: Prior to the Flood, murder must have been rampant (4:23-24; 6:5, 11). While the incidents involving Cain and Lamech imply that the death penalty was used before the Flood (4:14, 23-24), it is not until after the Flood that we find God mandating it: “Whoever sheds human blood, by humans shall their blood be shed” (9:6). The requirement that animals and human beings alike be put to death for murdering a human not only reaffirmed the value of human life but also instituted law. Commentators widely hold this command to have laid the foundation for all civil government.^{v vi} The principle, later formalized in the Mosaic Law and known as the *lex talionis* (“an eye for an eye” [Exodus 21:24]) was a check to the depraved human heart. Fear of punishment not only encouraged respect but also regulated justice, so that many lives were not claimed for the crimes of one. Punishment was to be commensurate with the crime.

- ii. Basis and Enactment of the Law: Man's creation in God's image is the basis for the sanctity of human life (9:6). While some view capital punishment as inconsistent with valuing human life, it is not inconsistent when human authorities enact justice *on God's behalf*. Except in special cases where governing authorities act in direct contradiction to God's laws, God considers them to be His representatives on earth (Romans 13:1-6).

E. Renewed in their Life Purpose – 9:7: In establishing a new world order, God assured Noah that more people would be born, a food source would be available, and human life was of high value. Finally, God reaffirmed His call to fruitfulness: “As for you, be fruitful and increase in number...” The words “as for you” appear to reflect a prioritizing of matters. Procreation was essential for the survival of the race and also gave Noah and his family, who were almost certainly reeling with shock from the overall Flood experience, a renewed sense of a God-given life purpose. Procreation was a place to begin.

Summary Statement: By nature, human beings are dependent on some measure of consistency, order, and purpose. We cannot survive without a few fixed principles in life. After the Flood, the shaken psyches of the human remnant needed direction and assurance. God blessed them with purpose and a few principles of order.

Principle: *Those who look to God are blessed with purpose in life and principles of order.*

Has it occurred to you that God can bring order into the details of our lives just as easily as He can give overarching principles for humanity? Too often, I have waited until I came to the end of my own resources before asking God to order my ways.

Illustration: On one occasion, when our four children were growing up, I was especially busy with responsibilities outside as well as inside our home. I felt frustrated daily, trying to balance my responsibilities. Finally, I asked God to give me a pattern by which to order and prioritize all my work. Several weeks went by before I received His answer. Late one night, I awoke with a sense that God wanted to speak to me. In that moment, I wasn't thinking about my earlier request at all. It was New Year's Eve and I thought perhaps God wanted me to thank Him for the past year. So when God first spoke to my heart, what I thought I heard didn't make sense to me. It was simply the words “four o'clock.” After a silent moment, the enlightenment came: I knew that God was telling me to set aside all of my responsibilities outside of the home by four o'clock each afternoon and after that, focus exclusively on my family's needs. The rule required some discipline on my part, but it turned out to be very effective. It isn't a rule that will work for everyone, but God knew it was the perfect solution for me. For the most part, I faithfully followed this rule the remainder of the time our children lived at home. And it most definitely brought the order that was needed to my days.

Application: Our God is an orderly God. He will help you order your days, if you ask Him to do this. Which area of your life needs God’s ordering? No one knows better than He.

Maybe you have arrived at a stage of life where you feel you’ve lost your purpose and you are waiting on Him for new direction. Often, our trouble is our own impatience with His timing in revealing a next step in our lives.

God’s primary purpose and will for our lives is conformity to the image of Jesus Christ (Romans 8:28-29). Waiting on Him accomplishes this by building our character and teaching us perseverance in prayer. Will you commit yourself to *that* purpose, first and foremost, while you seek Him for other specific direction?

Second, we can be reassured that God’s timing is always perfect. He is a loving Father who does not intend to make it difficult for us to discover His will. We may feel that a revelation of direction from Him is overdue, but that is never the case. If we are following all previous instructions from Him and seeking to please and follow Him, we can be assured that His time for us to leave our current activity or position has not arrived until He reveals the next step.

Transition: Purpose and order in life are God’s blessings. God also blessed Noah with a promise, a covenant.

II. A Covenant for the New World – Genesis 9:8-17

A. Ancient Covenants

- i. Discoveries: In 1933, a French archaeological expedition was working at Mari, an ancient Amorite city along the Euphrates River. Thousands of clay tablets were discovered in the town’s royal archives, vividly illustrating life in 18th century B.C. Mesopotamia. More specifically, along with the mid-second millennium B.C. Nuzi Letters (found in 1925 near the Tigris River in Iraq), the Mari Tablets are rich resources for understanding contractual agreements of the era in which Israel’s patriarchs lived.^{vii} Additionally, discoveries from the end of the Hittite Empire, although these come from a later period (1450-1200 B.C.), reveal *the format* of ancient treaties. Although the Flood occurred during the more ancient, primeval period, all of these tablets are still helpful since “customs ordinarily linger for many generations in the Middle East” (R. Youngblood).^{viii}
- ii. Types: Ancient treaties were often made after wars “as a step toward embarking on peace.”^{ix} The Hittites, although they may not have been the originators, particularly used two kinds of treaties: parity treaties and suzerainty treaties.
 1. A *parity treaty* is a covenant between equals, such as the head of the Hittite empire and the king of a foreign region.

2. A *suzerainty treaty* was an agreement a lord or king would make with his subjects. These were used after one king conquered another in battle, bringing those of the conquered land into subjection. The subjects had no say in these covenants. They included:
 - a. *A preamble*, identifying the lord or king (suzerain) making the covenant
 - b. *An historic prologue*, which described the past history between the nations, usually emphasizing the suzerain's past graciousness and goodness toward his new vassals and their history of disregard and disrespect toward him
 - c. *A main body*, which described the stipulations of the covenant – the specific obligations of the vassals toward their new sovereign. This section usually also included warnings about any attempt at rebellion.
 - d. On some occasions, these three main sections were followed by enumeration of blessings for obedience and curses for disobedience, an instruction that the covenant be kept in a safe place and read, from time to time, to the public, and, finally, a list of witnesses to the covenant.

In the *GOD of the WORD: Exodus*, we will see that God's covenant with Israel follows this distinctive format.

3. *Land Grants*, in which a sovereign deeds land, are a third kind of ancient covenant.

B. The Nature of Biblical Covenants

- i. Generally Given By God: It seems that mankind has always made legal agreements of one kind or another. The Bible tells of a few treaties between people, such as the treaty between Israel and the Gibeonites (Joshua 9-10) and the relationship between King Hiram of Phoenicia and Kings David and Solomon of Israel (1 Kings 5). However, Biblical covenants generally reference the covenants God has made. As early as Genesis 2, the Bible emphasizes God's involvement with and interest in the people He created. We should not be surprised that He has interacted in ways that are familiar to the people of each age. His covenants prove His interest in establishing a relationship with us.

- ii. Of the Suzerainty Variety: Since God has no equal, His covenants are never parity treaties. One possible exception is an agreement that is implied but not explicitly called a “covenant” in the Bible: the agreement among the members of the Trinity with regard to the plan of salvation (scholars sometimes refer to this as the “covenant of redemption”^x). As Lord of All and Sovereign of the Universe, He is certainly under no obligation to enter any kind of agreement with us. The covenants God has made are the suzerainty (or unilateral) variety.
- iii. Emphasis on the Promise: In Biblical covenants, the promise plays an important role. One historian calculated that out of roughly 7,500 treaties signed between 1500 B.C. and A.D. 1850 and stated to be eternally in effect, on average, the treaties actually only remained in effect for about two years! ^{xi} Unlike manmade contracts and promises, when God gives a promise, He keeps it!
- iv. Conditional or Unconditional: Some of God’s covenants are conditional on the behavior of His subjects and some are not. The covenant God made with Israel at Sinai included the consequences of transgressing it.
- v. Signs: God often gave a sign as a reminder of each of His covenants.

C. The Number of Biblical Covenants: When making a list of God’s covenants, some Bible scholars include more than others. For example, some include God’s promise of lasting priesthood to the priest Phinehas and his descendants (Numbers 25:10-13). Others believe that Genesis 1-2 imply a covenant with Adam and Eve that involved their responsibilities in the Garden and to the animals and obliged them to abstain from eating the fruit of the Tree of the Knowledge of Good and Evil. It is sometimes referred to as the Edenic or Adamic Covenant. However, there are five God-given covenants on every Bible student’s list. The first is God’s covenant with Noah.

- i. The Noachic Covenant: The Noachic Covenant was God’s unconditional covenant with all the earth never to destroy it again by flood.
- ii. The Patriarchal or Abrahamic Covenant: Later, God initiated a covenant with Abraham, in which Abraham was promised land, numerous descendants, and blessing to and through him.
- iii. The Mosaic or Sinaitic Covenant: Our Bible is divided between the Old and New Covenants, also referred to as Testaments. “Testament” is an English word translated from the Greek, signifying a covenant. ^{xiii} The “old” covenant is a reference to God’s covenant with Israel. It was given in Moses’ day to bless Israel, but it was conditional on obedience to His law.

- iv. The Davidic Covenant: Another widely recognized covenant is God’s unconditional promise that one of David’s descendants would always sit on Israel’s throne. The reign of Jesus Christ is the ultimate fulfillment of this promise (Matthew 1:1-17).
- v. The New Covenant: The prophets Jeremiah and Ezekiel foretold a “new” covenant, the one for which our New Testament is named. It is God’s unconditional promise to change hearts, so that we could know Him on the basis of relationship rather than on the basis of rules. Jesus inaugurated it at His last meal with His disciples (1 Corinthians 11:23-26) and sealed it on Calvary with His blood. It is commemorated by the ordinances of baptism and communion.

D. The Rainbow: The covenant God gave in Genesis 9 was to Noah, his sons, their descendants, and every living creature on earth. It was His unilateral, unconditional guarantee never to destroy the entire earth and all its inhabitants again by flood. The rainbow was the sign of this covenant.

- i. Cessation of Hostility: The English word translated “rainbow” is simply “bow” (“qeset”) in the Hebrew. This word “bow” is normally used with regard to weaponry (as in bow and arrows). Thus, in other places, it is translated “weapon.” Rainbows may or may not have appeared prior to the Flood; most often, it is assumed they did not. God said that this sign was to remind Noah that God Himself was remembering His promise (9:15). Some have suggested that the hanging of God’s bow in the sky indicated a cessation of His hostility carried out in the judgment of the Flood – it was a sign of peace.^{xiii} In their visions of the throne room of God, Ezekiel and John describe the appearance of a rainbow (Ezekiel 1:28, Revelation 4:3). Scholar Franz Delitzsch said that for us, every rainbow “typifies the readiness of the heavenly to pervade the earthly.”^{xiv} He has hung His “bow” for now, but future judgment awaits.
- ii. Much Needed Assurance: But let’s not miss the significance of the rainbow for Noah’s family! Every future drop of rain could easily have been understood as the onset of life-threatening devastation and triggered post-traumatic terror. The rainbow assured Noah’s sons that they would live to fulfill their charge to multiply and fill the earth.

Summary Statement: God made an unconditional promise that gave Noah and his family the security they needed to live healthy lives.

Principle: *God’s promises are intended to assure us.*

Today, all who receive Christ as Savior and Lord live under the New Covenant. God has guaranteed that we no longer need to fear the wrath of His judgment. He calls us His own children, even His friends (John 15:15). He has promised that we will remain in relationship with Him eternally. Yet many Christians live with insecurity and fears that belie their true position under this covenant – a belief that God cannot be trusted and we cannot be assured of His love, protection, guidance, goodness, or His faithfulness.

Application: Do you live with confidence that you can fulfill the mission God has given you? All of God’s promises are intended for our assurance. We miss the point if we only know of them and stop short of believing and applying them to our present need. Which of His promises do you need to remember, believe, and apply today?

- Are you lonely? Do you need relational assurance? Jesus has promised He will never leave you (Hebrews 13:5).
- Is it financial assurance you need? He has promised to see your needs and provide for you, just as He provides for the birds of the air (Matthew 6:25-33).
- Do you lack confidence that you belong to Him? Maybe you need spiritual assurance. God has promised to faithfully forgive and cleanse those who confess their sins to Him (1 John 1:9). He has promised to make sons and daughters of those who put their trust in Jesus (John 1:12; 1 John 2:3-6). Our assurance is based on *His* faithfulness to *His* promises, not our faithfulness to Him. The God who established His new covenant 2,000 years ago is still faithful to His promises today!

Conclusion

I pray that you will never experience any kind of true psychological trauma, but *anytime* we are overwhelmed, God is there to offer direction and assurance, just as He did for Noah.

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^v Mathews, K. A. (1996). *Genesis 1-11:26. The New American Commentary, 1A* (404-405). Nashville: Broadman & Holman Publishers.

^{vi} Keil, C. F., & Delitzsch, F. (1996). *Vol. 1: Commentary on the Old Testament* (97). Peabody, MA: Hendrickson.

^{vii} Youngblood, Ronald (1971). *The Heart of the Old Testament* (23, 38-39). Grand Rapids, MI: Baker Book House.

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^x Grudem, Wayne (1994). *Systematic Theology* (518-519). Grand Rapids, MI: Zondervan.

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