

GOD'S COVENANT WITH NOAH

Genesis 6–9

Memory Verse: *"While earth remains, seedtime and harvest, cold and heat, summer and winter, day and night, shall not cease"* (Gen. 8:22 ESV).

Background Helps:

In the generations following Adam and Eve, the human race multiplied (Gen. 6:1), just as God had said (Gen. 1:28). But at the same time sin also increased, until "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 was sorry 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.' But Noah found favor in the eyes of the LORD" (Gen. 6:5-8 ESV). (See also the description of mankind's evil in Gen. 6:11-13.)

God decided to establish a "covenant" with Noah (Gen. 6:18)—the first use of this term in the Bible. The familiar story of the flood and Noah's ark is told in Genesis 6–9. After the flood, in Genesis 9:8-17, God lays out the specific terms of his covenant with Noah. Notice:

- The parties of the covenant: God established this covenant with Noah, his offspring, and every living creature on earth.
- The terms of the covenant are determined and imposed by God alone.
- What are the terms? God promised "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 to earth" (9:11).
- God set a rainbow in the clouds as a sign and seal (a guarantee) of this covenant, a reminder to God himself of the promise he had made.
- God referred to this covenant with Noah as an "everlasting" covenant (9:16).
- No specific response is required of man in this covenant. It is truly a covenant of grace.

This covenant is an expression of God's "common grace," that is, the grace that he shows to all people everywhere and to his entire creation. (This "common grace" is to be distinguished from God's "special grace" or "saving grace" which he shows, in the Old Testament, to his chosen people Israel and, in the New Testament, to his church.)

Notice earlier in Genesis 8:20-22, before his formal announcement of the covenant in 9:8-17, how God responded to the animal sacrifices offered by Noah (v. 20). He promised never again to the curse the ground or to destroy every living creature as he had done (v. 21). Rather, "While the earth remains, seedtime and harvest, cold and heat, summer and winter, day and night, shall not cease" (v. 22). This promise is our memory verse, and God has kept this promise up to the present day! His covenant with Noah is still in effect (see Isa. 54:9; Jer. 33:20, 25). These animal sacrifices foreshadowed the future sacrifice of Christ, indicating that all the blessings of God, even those of his "common grace," come to us only through the Mediator, Jesus Christ.

In Genesis 9:1, 7 God reissued the mandate that he had earlier given to Adam and Eve (Gen. 1:28) to “be fruitful and multiply and fill the earth.” The LORD is giving mankind a second chance. It is as though Noah is a new Adam, a new head of the human race. The world after the flood is like a new creation. “The covenant made with Noah creates a firm stage of history where God can work out his plan for rescuing his fallen world.”¹ In other words, in the new world that emerges after the flood, sustained by God’s covenant with Noah, God works out his plan of salvation with the human race. This plan will involve additional covenants of his special grace with Abraham, Israel, and David and the new covenant through Jesus Christ. Stay tuned!

Lesson Helps:


A possible lesson aim: My students will learn about God’s covenant with Noah, so that they will thank God for his faithfulness.


While you will want to review the whole story of Noah and the flood (perhaps using the storytelling techniques reviewed in the last forecast), concentrate on the covenant that God makes with Noah in Genesis 8:20–9:17. Miscellaneous suggestions:

- Go over the parties to the covenant, the terms of the covenant, the length of the covenant, the sign of the covenant, etc. (See under “Background Helps” above.)
- Bring in some striking pictures of rainbows (or use your computer!), and emphasize the message of God’s faithfulness communicated by this sign
- Review the memory verse, Genesis 8:22.
- Notice the link between God’s promises in 8:21-22 and the sacrifices offered by Noah in 8:20, foreshadowing the sacrifice of Christ. Connect the promises of the covenant with Noah to Christ’s sacrifice: Ultimately, all of God’s good gifts come to us through Christ.
- Close your class with a time of thanksgiving for God’s faithfulness to his covenant promises to Noah (which are also to us!).
- Sing the second verse of “Great Is Thy Faithfulness,” which echoes the promise of Genesis 8:22.

Note: In the younger classes, don’t avoid using the word “covenant,” even though it is unfamiliar vocabulary. It is an important biblical term, and we will be using it this entire year. As we study the covenants week by week, the meaning of the word will become more and more clear to us all. With younger ones (and for that matter, older ones too!), explain the meaning of covenant by using more common words like “promise,” “commitment,” and “contract.” The solemn vows taken in marriage are a familiar example of covenant in our culture. But remember, in the covenants God makes with man, he is always the superior party and we the inferior. He determines all the terms of the covenant; we are not equal partners. Of course, the terms of the covenants of our gracious God are always for our good.

Home Assignment:

 Read Genesis 12–13; 15.

 Memorize Romans 4:3.

¹ Peter J. Gentry & Stephen J. Wellum, *God’s Kingdom through God’s Covenants* (Wheaton, IL: Crossway, 2015), 66.