

International Sunday School Lesson Study Notes

Lesson Text: Genesis 9:8-17

Lesson Title: An Everlasting Covenant

Introduction

Genesis holds the keys to understanding the creation of man, the origin of sin and evil, and God's plan for the redemption of mankind and hope for a lost and dying world. Truths found in chapters 3-11 of Genesis lays a solid foundation for the rest of the story.

The story of the world wide flood and Noah's ark is one of the most interesting portions of Genesis. Details of the flood are recorded in Genesis 6:14-9:29. While most of us like to think about the boat and the beautiful rainbow in relation to the flood, we must never forget the reason God sent the flood. The moral degeneration of man begins to reveal itself in Genesis 4 by Cain and Lamech, and reaches its peak in Genesis 6:1-13. As the human race multiplied and expanded, so did sin and evil. Man became so wicked that God had to judge them, and He did so in the great flood (Genesis 6:5).

With the exception of Noah's family the flood destroyed all of human life. God clearly considered the sins of the human race so wicked that nothing short of near total destruction would satisfy His holy demands. Although Noah was a sinner and part of the human race God destroyed, the Bible says, "*Noah found grace in the eyes of the LORD*" (Genesis 6:8). "Grace" is "the undeserved favor of God." Noah found eternal life in God's saving grace and was therefore spared from the destruction of the wicked. He was not a perfect man but he was a faithful man who made a choice to walk with God. He found a greater life in God than what was offered to him by the world around him.

After the flood waters receded, "*Noah builded an altar unto the LORD; and took of every clean beast, and of every clean fowl, and offered burnt offerings on the altar*" (Genesis 8:20). This offering expressed his thankfulness to God for eternal salvation and salvation from the flood waters. This offering became the ground of the Lord's covenant with Noah. Noah's offering pleased the Lord and the Lord said, "*I will not again curse the ground any more for man's sake...*" (Genesis 8:21).

On the heels of that promise God made a "covenant" with Noah. A "covenant" is a binding agreement between two parties. In biblical times when you made a

"covenant" with someone it was taken seriously. Everything about your character depended upon whether or not you kept the covenant. God gave Noah the terms of His covenant with him. These terms deal with both discipline and diet. Prior to the flood there had been no law and order, no human restraint for evil. Now, capital punishment is instituted. God told Noah, *"Whoso sheddeth man's blood, by man shall his blood be shed: for in the image of God made he man"* (Genesis 9:6). Capital punishment is "the lawful infliction of death as a punishment" and is based on the fact that man is created in the image of God. Capital punishment is still biblical today (Romans 13:14). Also, prior to the flood, man was restricted to a vegetarian diet. That would now change and man would be allowed to eat meat (Genesis 9:3). Vegetarianism has no scriptural basis. The Lord Jesus Himself ate flesh, even in His resurrection body (Luke 24:41-43).

Along with these aspects of God's covenant with Noah came one of the most blessed parts we are studying in our lesson text. God made a promise to Noah that He would never again destroy the world by means of a flood (Genesis 9:8-17). God Himself called it "the everlasting covenant" (Genesis 9:16).

Genesis 9:8-17 is all about God and what He is going to do for Noah and humanity. God has told Noah what he and his family are to do in Genesis 9:1-7. Now it is all about what God will do for Noah. This is very important because this establishes that God is a covenant maker. He is a God who makes promises, who makes covenants. He is a God who keeps His promises (1 Thessalonians 5:24). From now on throughout the Bible, God is known as a covenant making God who is faithful to keep His covenant. And today we are studying the first covenant that God makes His everlasting covenant with Noah.

A Promise Spoken (Genesis 9:8-11)

Verse 8-10

"And God spake unto Noah, and to his sons with him, saying, And I, behold, I establish my covenant with you, and with your seed after you; And with every living creature that is with you, of the fowl, of the cattle, and of every beast of the earth with you; from all that go out of the ark, to every beast of the earth."

The word "covenant" is used seven times in verses 8-17 means "alliance or pledge." By using the word seven times the Holy Spirit is showing us the strength of God's pledge and commitment to Noah and humanity. God told Noah, "I establish my covenant with you..." "Establish" means "to make powerful, to make able to stand." The word "establish" is used again in verse 11 and then in the past

tense, "established" in verse 17. The thought of these words is that God will do this immediately and it will be done completely and securely. There will be no red tape involved or bureaucracy involved. This will not get bogged down in committee or postponed to another time. God will do this for Noah and humanity.

While this covenant is called "The Noachic Covenant" by theologians, the covenant was established with Noah, his "seed," and "every living creature that is with you," including the "fowl, cattle, and every best of the earth." Not only would Noah be a recipient of God's promise, but his children and their children and all humanity would be blessed by what God was about to do. Humans, birds, beasts, and wild animals are all beneficiaries of this covenant.

"With you," and "with your seed" are key words in verses 8-11. To think that the God of heaven as high and holy as He is would enter into a covenant with man is amazing. All of God's covenants with man are of His own making. God alone is the initiator. Three times God calls the covenant "my covenant" (vv.9, 11, 15). It does not require any action or even acceptance on Noah or his son's part to be a covenant. God made the covenant "with" them and with every human being and every living creature on the planet.

Verse 11

"And I will establish my covenant with you; neither shall all flesh be cut off any more by the waters of a flood; neither shall there any more be a flood to destroy the earth."

The "covenant" God "established" with Noah, his sons, all humanity and "every beast of the earth" was that there will never be worldwide destruction by water again. It doesn't matter how sinful and wicked man gets God will never repeat the flood of Noah's day. God's "covenant" with Noah is a promise of unconditional mercy by God throughout human history. This promise of mercy is stressed by the double use of the words "neither shall" in verse 11 and "no more" in verse 15. As though to make His point very clear, God said, "never again." From that day on Noah and his family would never have to worry about a worldwide flood.

If you are wondering why this promise was so important and what it meant to Noah and his family, consider the following possibilities. Before the Flood there was no rain upon the earth (Genesis 2:4-5). The earth was watered from the vapor and dew like moisture on the ground. When it rained the first time on earth the heavens opened up and it rained for forty days (Genesis 7:4-12). So, when Noah thought about "rain," that's what he thought about. Can you imagine the fear it

would have brought the first time Noah felt a rain drop or heard a storm coming after the flood? Rain is going to be a common thing from now on upon the earth and Noah needs to know that every time it rains the earth is not going to be destroyed (Isaiah 54:9).

Note: God's covenant with Noah was a physical temporal covenant. The animals shared in this promise that no worldwide flood would ever occur again. But think about the spiritual promises God has made to you as His child. Because of God's merciful and gracious promises there are many things believers need never worry about. Think about some of the unconditional promises in God's Word and what they mean to you as God's child. Think about promises God has made about taking care of you, supplying all your need, never leaving or forsaking you, going with you to the end of the world, preparing a home in heaven for you (Matthew 10:29-31).

A Promise Token (Genesis 9:12-17)

Verse 12-13

"And God said, This is the token of the covenant which I make between me and you and every living creature that is with you, for perpetual generations: I do set my bow in the cloud, and it shall be for a token of a covenant between me and the earth."

Again God states that His covenant with Noah is also with "every living creature that is with you, for perpetual generations." God has *verbally* given His covenant throughout Genesis 9. Now God gives a *visual reminder* by placing a "bow in the cloud." From this day forward the rainbow would be a visible token "of a covenant between" God and the earth.

Whether or not there had ever been a rainbow prior to this occasion is not important. What is important is that from this point on the rainbow is a token of God's promise. When God gave Abraham a covenant the sign was circumcision (Genesis 17:11). When God gave Moses a covenant the sign was the Sabbath (Exodus 31:16-17). The sign, the oath, the mark, the symbol, the evidence that God has made a promise, this is the assurance, this is the guarantee, and this is a covenant made with all humanity, all animals, and so God has to have a sign that everybody can see, so He says, "I do set my bow in the cloud." And that's the reason for rainbows.

What is significant about a "rainbow?" Is it the colors or shape? Is it the fact that it appears during or after a storm? Those are the three aspects of this token that most of us consider. However, consider the two words that make up the word "rainbow." Notice, God called His token a "bow." While the word "bow" does appear in other places in the Bible referring to the rainbow (Genesis 9:13-16; Ezekiel 1:28), the actual word "rainbow" doesn't appear in the Bible until Revelation 4:3 and 10:1. The word "bow" in the Bible is usually used in a hunting or warfare context (Genesis 27:3; 48:22; 1 Samuel 18:4; 1 Kings 22:34; Psalm 11:2). When you think of a "bow" you think of an arrow also. It is an instrument of war. But this "bow" that God gives as a "token" of His promise doesn't have an arrow. Perhaps the symbolism in God's use of the "bow" is to say to Noah and to us, the judgment has passed and this particular battle is over. It's a beautiful thought for a beautiful token. There will come a day when the world will be destroyed and replaced by a new heaven and a new earth where there will be only the righteous and eternal peace and holiness. In the future, God will pick up His bow again. But for now, the bow is the sign of mercy, it's the sign of grace, it's the sign of peace. The great God who is a warrior has hung up His bow.

Verse 14-16

"And it shall come to pass, when I bring a cloud over the earth, that the bow shall be seen in the cloud: And I will remember my covenant, which is between me and you and every living creature of all flesh; and the waters shall no more become a flood to destroy all flesh. And the bow shall be in the cloud; and I will look upon it, that I may remember the everlasting covenant between God and every living creature of all flesh that is upon the earth."

The "bow" or "token" of God's promise not to destroy the earth again by water was not visible all the time. In fact, when you look at the earth's surfaces, the mountains, canyons, and rocky hillsides, these are all reminders of the presence of the flood. But when you look up after a storm, God occasionally places a "bow" in the "cloud" as a reminder that He will never again "destroy all flesh." Every time you see a rainbow, it represents the victory of grace over judgment.

A "bow," or rainbow as we know it today, is a combination of the sunshine and the rain, and it means that the storm is over. Our rainbow today is the cross of Calvary. Our sign that the storm and the judgment is passed is the cross of our Savior. When Jesus died on the cross the judgment of God was poured out upon Him for our sins and now that we are in Jesus Christ that means that the cross is our rainbow, the cross is our token, it is our sign that God has already judged our sins in the person

of His Son the Lord Jesus Christ. It's a token and a promise to us that never again will we be judged for our sins.

The phrase, "And I will remember my covenant..." doesn't mean that God forgets about His promise until He sees the rainbow, it means that God is about to fulfill a promise. "Remember" is an often used word in the Old Testament in relation to God. It never means God forgets but it is a word He chose to use to remind us that He never forgets His promises!

Verse 17

"And God said unto Noah, This is the token of the covenant, which I have established between me and all flesh that is upon the earth."

If you're thinking that God has been repeating Himself in today's text you're right. But it is not because God is clarifying or just repeating words for the sake of repeating. God states the entire story one more time to "Noah." He states it again so Noah, his sons, their sons, and you and I will never forget. God has made a covenant, a promise to Noah and the "token of the covenant" is a rainbow. God has "established" or "made the bow to stand in the clouds" as a reminder that He is faithful. He will never destroy the world again by a flood.

Conclusion

The covenant God made with Noah is just one example of His faithfulness. God is a covenant maker and a covenant keeper. Although there have been thousands and thousands of localized floods all over the world since this promise was made, the world has not and will not be completely destroyed by water again. Of this we can be sure.

Sometimes we experience a localized flood of loneliness and then we remember His promise, "*I will never leave thee, nor forsake thee*" (Hebrews 13:5). Sometimes we feel the localized flood of worry and anxiety attempting to drown us in despair and then we remember His promise, "*Casting all your care upon him; for he careth for you*" (1 Peter 5:7). Sometimes the localized floods of this present world can cause us to think the promises of God are going to be washed away and leave us to ourselves. But remember, "*Faithful is he that calleth you, who will also do it*" (1 Thessalonians 5:24).

Amen.

