

Genesis 9: God's Covenant with Noah

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COVENANTS

When we describe a covenant in the Bible, it is the merging of two concepts, a law and a promise (Rom. 9:4). It is an unbreakable oath, and cannot be added to or annulled once entered. It is only severed by death. There are seven great covenants in the Bible; Adam, Noah, Abraham, Moses, Phinehas, David and Jesus. In Genesis 9, God creates the covenant of Noah, a covenant with Noah and all of his descendants.

Noah's covenant contains the law of blood. In that law God makes clear that man may eat of meat, but cannot eat of blood. This is because blood becomes the symbol for life; thus, man cannot take the life of another man. One might consider that there are implied commands in this law; those things which relate to blood (a respect for life, marriage and the home).

Noah's covenant also contained important promises. Corresponding to the law of blood are the Promises of Life. God promised that He would never again to flood the earth. He authorized mankind to fill the earth, and gave mankind dominion over the earth.

DOMINION OVER THE EARTH

God's covenant with Noah left man as the supreme being on earth. This is related in Psalm 8:3-9, where David prophetically points to the dominion of Christ over the earth. Man's purpose in this dominion was to subjugate and reign over it. We see parts of this in the covenant of Moses; commandments to show care for the beast (Deut. 25:4) and the land (Lev. 25:3-5). Some of the wisdom writings reveal that God identified a careful stewardship with righteousness (Prov. 12:10, Job 31:38-39).

Another part of this dominion was that man (and beast) would no longer be vegetarian, but the eating of meat was ordained. In the New Covenant, 1 Timothy 4:4-5 gives us a similar authority with a clear command for this sanctification: we must receive it with thanksgiving. One way this is demonstrated by Jesus is the offering of a prayer of thanks before meals. It would seem that this is not just a tradition, but something important towards the sanctification of food.

One important part of this law was the prohibition of the consumption of blood. This law is carried on into the Law of Moses as well (Lev. 17) as well as the command not to eat fat. God says here that the life is in the blood, therefore man was commanded not to eat it. Later it is clarified in Lev. 17 that the purpose of this command is that "the life of the flesh is in the blood, and I have given it for you on the altar to make atonement for your souls, for it is the blood that makes atonement by the life" (Lev. 17:11). In the New Testament, the Christians in Jerusalem instruct other churches not to eat of blood because of the offense to Jews who still hold the law of Moses.

SANCTITY OF LIFE

God makes it clear that the sanctity of human life is because man (all men, Job 10:8, Ps. 119:73) are formed in the image of God. There are certain questions that arise over this.

Suicide: all of the suicides in the Bible (with the exception of Samson, a special case) were by depraved men in sinful conditions. What about when people are suffering? When Job's wife told him to "curse God and die", he rejected her advice as foolishness. Even in extreme suffering, suicide is not an option. What

about helping others self-murder? When David caught the man who aided Saul in his suicide, he was executed for murder.

Abortion: the Bible says that man was formed by God in the womb.

Job 31:15 Did not he who made me in the womb make them? Did not the same one form us both within our mothers?

Psalm 139:13 For you created my inmost being; you knit me together in my mother's womb. I praise you because I am fearfully and wonderfully made

Isaiah 44:24 This is what the Lord says — your Redeemer, who formed you in the womb

Jeremiah 1:5 Before I formed you in the womb I knew you, before you were born I set you apart

Does the age, development, etc change it? The law of Moses tells us that it does not in Exodus 21:22-24, where the injury to a fetus resulted in “Eye for an eye” repercussions.

Self-defense: We see God’s rule of self-defense in the law of Moses in Exodus 22:1-3. There it was clear that one could take another person's life if they were in danger. The apostles themselves carried weapons for their protection (Luke 22:38). But we must be careful that when we act, it is in defense of our lives, not our property (Matthew 5:38-42)

Capital punishment: In Genesis 9 God commanded that those who take life were subject to execution. Taking a life as a form of justice is only an ancient right of government as seen in Romans 13:1-4 and Leviticus 24:16. As Christians, such is not our place. The same is true of warfare; a country will be judged for this conduct, but Christians do not have a place in it.

Prolonging Life: Technology enables us to extend life by curing diseases, preventing death, keeping alive under dire circumstances or keeping alive when the mind is gone. Are Christians obligated to prolong life? In Philippians 1:21-24 & II Timothy 4:6-8 Paul made it clear that any prolonging of his life was to meet the obligations he had; otherwise, he looked forward to his reward. In Acts 7:58 & 12:2 we see Christians put to death when they may have had an opportunity to flee. Ultimately, we look to Jesus on the Cross in John 19:30. When death was inevitable and when His earthly obligations were completed (i.e. care of His mother) He surrendered His spirit. He did not fight to continue living, and it was certainly not suicide to do so.

NOAH’S LEGACY

The last thing we read on Noah is his sin with alcohol. This is the first mention of alcohol in the Bible, and it reveals the danger of worldliness it brings. Noah sinned by being drunk, and Ham sinned (in a fashion that is not entirely clear). This brought a series of curses on Ham in his son Canaan. Thus we see that even righteous men stumble and there are consequences to sin.

THE RAINBOW

When we consider the rainbow, we see it as a sign of propitiation, not different than the cross. It shows God’s peace through the expression of His wrath. Consider that the rainbow is made of light and water; in 1 John 5:7-8 we are told that today, our salvation is confirmed by the Spirit (the Word, a light to our path), water and blood.

