

“A Fresh Start” (Genesis 9:1-17)

In a *Peanuts* cartoon strip Lucy and Linus are staring out the window, watching it rain. The conversation goes like this: Lucy: “Boy! Look at it pour. What if it floods the whole world?” Linus: “It won’t. In Genesis 9, God promised Noah that would never happen again. The sign of that promise is the rainbow.” Lucy, turning back to the window with a big smile: “You’ve taken a great load off my mind.” Linus: “Sound theology has a way of doing that.”¹

We laugh at that cartoon but my man Linus was on to something. Sound theology not only takes a load off our minds; it also teaches us what God is like and what He expects of us. Theology is not dry, dull, and boring. Nor is it just for biblical scholars who sit in ivory tower libraries. Theology is meant to alter the way we live life. As we look at Genesis 9:1-17, we are going to learn how a strong theology guides us through this life.

[In the first seven verses, we learn that a strong theology helps us to...]

1. Appreciate the value of life (9:1-7). Moses begins with these words: “**And God blessed Noah and his sons and said to them, ‘Be fruitful and multiply, and fill the earth’**” (9:1).² This verse is a renewal of God’s first blessing and commission to Adam (1:28).³ Like Adam, Noah and his sons were blessed and commanded to reproduce and fill the earth. The word “**blessed**” is the key word in Genesis.⁴ It is a reminder that the God of the Bible has always been a God that blesses His people (cf. Jas 1:17). This is such a good word for us to hear. It is so easy to be restless and discontent. We always want more. We are never satisfied. Yet, God’s will for us is to express gratitude for His every blessing. A strong theology appreciates God’s many blessings.

Additional blessings are found in 9:2-4: “**The fear of you and the terror of you will be on every beast of the earth and on every bird of the sky; with everything that creeps on the ground, and all the fish of the sea, into your hand they are given. Every moving thing that is alive shall be food for you; I give all to you, as I gave the green plant. Only you shall not eat flesh with its life, that is, its blood.**” Why did God put this fear and terror of man in all creatures? For two reasons: (1) For the protection of animals who will no longer be at peace with man, and (2) for the protection of man who will no longer be at peace with animals. Moses writes that God gave the animals into Noah’s hands⁵ (Jer 27:5). This means humans have been given authority over animals. The Lord then informs Noah and his boys that meat is to be a normal part of the human diet.⁶ The only restriction is that they must not eat meat with the blood in it.⁷ Humans are not to devour animals the way animals devour one another, while the blood is pulsating in the flesh. The reason for this is respect for life and the giver of life. In Leviticus 17:11, Moses teaches that life is in the blood and God is the giver of life.⁸ Disregard for the gift of life is an affront to the giver of life.⁹

Moses continues to record the Lord’s words in 9:5: “**Surely I will require¹⁰ your lifeblood; from every beast I will require it. And from every man, from every man’s brother I will require the life of man.**” God will demand an accounting of any animal that sheds man’s blood (see Exod 21:28). So valuable is human life that a compensation of life will even be exacted from animals.¹¹ The last phrase of 9:5 is a bit confusing. The literal translation is “from the hand of a man, his brother.” The point is that God will require the blood of someone who kills, since the person killed is a relative (“brother”) of the killer. The language reflects Noah’s situation (after the flood everyone would be part of Noah’s extended family), but also supports the concept of the brotherhood of mankind. According to the Genesis account the entire human race descended from Noah.¹²

In 9:6, the Lord puts His law in a compelling poetic stanza, which declares: “**Whoever sheds man’s blood, by man his blood shall be shed,¹³ for in the image of God He made man.**” As we look at this controversial verse, it is important to note two things.

First, it is clear that this verse is giving us a command and not just a suggestion or permission. Verse 5 states that God demands a punishment: “**from every man, from every man’s brother I will require the life of man.**” Three times in 9:5, the Lord Himself says, “**I will require**” blood for blood. This is what I would call putting emphasis on a command with an exclamation point! It is also important to note that God has never countermanded this command. Consequently, it is still in force.

Second, the reason given for this action is one that remains in force for as long as men and women are made in the image of God. In 1:26, when God created man, He created him in the image of God. Until human history ends, all men and women will be created in the image of God. Into the eternal realm, man will continue to bear the image of God.

These two observations help us to conclude that God instituted capital punishment. Of course, the natural question is: why? The Bible provides four very important reasons:

- 1) Human life is so precious and sacred to God that when murder is committed, the death penalty is in order (Lev 24:17-18). When a person murders another human being, he or she extinguishes a revelation of God.¹⁴ God takes this very seriously.
- 2) The person who murders another being made in God’s image shows contempt for God as well. To kill another person usurps God’s sovereign authority over life and death. When a man or woman murders another person he or she assumes the role of God.
- 3) Capital punishment provides appropriate justice. The Scriptures teach there is a divine validity to punishment for crime. Before the flood, the lack of capital punishment led to blood vendettas.¹⁵
- 4) Capital punishment is intended to serve as a deterrent.¹⁶ Any society that loses its reverence for life cannot long endure. For this reason, God instituted capital punishment as a gracious restraint upon man’s sinful tendency toward violence. Some people raise the issue of Christian love and forgiveness. Undoubtedly, these expressions are very important but they do not necessarily negate the consequences of one’s actions.¹⁷

Although the Bible teaches the death penalty for deliberate and premeditated murder,¹⁸ it is important to remember that this responsibility is the sole prerogative of human government;¹⁹ because government is a “minister” of God (Rom 13:1-4).²⁰ Of course, the death penalty must be applied with such reluctance that where “reasonable doubt” exists, we err on the side of mercy and waive the death penalty. In an imperfect judicial system not all defendants will be treated equally or fairly because economic status, social standing, race, or political and legal connections will place some “above the law.” However, we will warn that such cheating does not escape God’s notice, nor does it change His laws. It only becomes another divine indictment on that society that dares to exercise unevenly the divinely ordained demand for justice. That nation is going to be judged for such a cavalier attitude toward God’s mission.²¹

The Lord closes this section in 9:7 with a strong contrast by reiterating what he said in 9:1: “**As for you, be fruitful and multiply; populate the earth abundantly and multiply in it.**” Against the backdrop of the warnings about taking life, God now again reminds His people to produce life. [Sound theology helps us to appreciate the value of life. It also enables us to...]

2. Celebrate God’s Covenant (9:8-17). In 9:8-17, God told Noah and his sons that He would preserve life by not flooding the entire earth ever again (see 9:11, 15). Moses writes, **“Now behold, I Myself do establish My covenant with you, and with your descendants after you; and with every living creature that is with you, the birds, the cattle, and every beast of the earth with you; of all that comes out of the ark, even every beast of the earth. I establish My covenant with you; and all flesh shall never again be cut off by the water of the flood, neither shall there again be a flood to destroy the earth. This is the sign of the covenant²² which I am making between Me and you and every living creature that is with you, for all successive generations; I set My bow in the cloud, and it shall be for a sign of a covenant between Me and the earth. It shall come about, when I bring a cloud over the earth, that the bow will 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 never again shall the water become a flood to destroy all flesh. When the bow is in the cloud, then I will look upon it, to remember the everlasting covenant between God and every living creature of all flesh that is on the earth. And God said to Noah, ‘This is the sign of the covenant which I have established between Me and all flesh that is on the earth.’”**

This passage reveals three important aspects to God’s covenant. This **“covenant”** is unconditional (9:9), universal (9:9-10, 17), and eternal (9:12, 16).²³ Several clues bear this out:

- 1) The recurrence of **“I,” “Myself,”** and **“My”** demonstrates the unconditional nature of this covenant. God Himself will ensure that this covenant is carried out. It is not dependent upon man’s work or faithfulness. This is how God typically works. There is nothing man can do to earn His favor.
- 2) The replication of the phrase **“every living creature”** (9:10a, 10b; 12b) and its equivalents, **“all flesh”** (9:11b; 15b; 17b), and **“every living creature of all flesh”** (9:15a; 16b)—a total of eight times, affirms God’s passionate concern for, and certain commitment to, the preservation and care of all living species on the earth.²⁴ Since God appreciates both animal and human life, so should we.
- 3) God clearly states that this is an **“eternal covenant”** (9:16), **“for all successive generations”** (9:12). Since God is the eternal God who dwells outside of space and time, He can maintain His covenants as long as He sovereignly chooses. The Bible teaches that God fulfills His covenants and promises. If He failed to fulfill even one covenant or promise, He would cease to be God. Furthermore, if He failed, or fails sometime in the future, how could we know with any degree of confidence that the Gospel is trustworthy? Those that suggest the Scripture has errors often overlook this point. Yet, God’s Word must be free of inaccuracies or God is not God and the rest of His Word is suspect, at best.

A biblical covenant usually involved three things: parties, terms, and promises. Suppose that you were a painter and I wanted my house painted. We could make a covenant together. You and I would be the two parties involved and the terms would include what areas were to be painted, what color, and when the job should be completed. The promise I made to you would be in the amount of money I was going to pay you when the job was finished. Your promise to me would be that the job would be completed as originally agreed. The agreement that we make concerning these elements: parties, terms, and promises, would be the covenant that we made with each other.

When God makes a covenant with us, it normally involves these three elements. The difference is that God alone determines the terms of the agreement, and that God always comes through on His end of the deal.

If God is willing to make a covenant with us, and He is willing to bind Himself to that covenant no matter what, what does that say about the relationship God wants to have with us? It says that we can be hopeful about the future, because we worship a God that not only desires our companionship, but who is willing to take the steps necessary to obligate Himself to that relationship.

In 9:12-17, God also attaches significance to the rainbow as a **“sign”** of His covenant.²⁵ The Hebrew word for rainbow (*qeset*) is also the word for a battle bow. The point seems to be that the bow is now “put away,” hung in place by the clouds, suggesting that the “battle,” the storm, is over. Thus the rainbow speaks of peace.²⁶ As a result, whenever clouds appear over the earth and a rainbow appears, God will **“remember”**²⁷ His covenant with man.²⁸ God said that the rainbow would cause Him to remember His unconditional covenant with man.²⁹ God is a faithful God!

I hope you have seen that a sound theology helps us to appreciate the value of life and celebrate God’s covenant. My prayer for you today is that you are living with gratitude to God for His gift of life and that you are enjoying your relationship with God who is a covenant keeper.

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Notes

¹ Charles Swindoll, *Eternal Security: The Assurance of Our Salvation* (Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 1995).

² This is the third time God blesses human beings (Gen 1:28; 5:2) and commands them to be fruitful (1:28; 8:17).

³ The world often refers to someone who is fortunate as leading a “blessed” life. But who is really blessed in life? The Scriptures tell us: Psalm 144:15: “How Blessed are the people whose God is the LORD.” Romans 4:7-8: “Blessed are those whose lawless deeds have been forgiven, and whose sins have been covered; blessed is the man whose sin the Lord will not take into account.”

⁴ Heb. *barak* (“bless”) means “to confer benefit.” It occurs approximately 80 times in Genesis.

⁵ The “hand” signifies power.

⁶ As with Adam, God also gave Noah dominion over the animals and permission to eat food with only one prohibition (cf. Gen 1:26, 28-29; 2:16-17). God gave Noah permission to eat animals (9:3). Until now, evidently people had eaten only plants (cf. 1:29; 2:16). Deffinbaugh writes, “One may puzzle that flesh could be eaten after the flood, but not before (or so it seems). It may be that conditions on the earth so changed that protein was now necessary for life. More likely, man must be brought to the realization that, because of his sin, he could only live by the death of another. Man lives by the death of animals.” Bob Deffinbaugh, *Genesis: From Paradise to Patriarchs*. Lesson 9: Noahic Covenant; a New Beginning: Genesis 8:20-9:17 (www.bible.org, 1997), 3.

⁷ Blood was the sign of mercy for Israel at the first Passover (Exod 12:13). Blood sealed God’s covenant with Israel (Exod 24:8). Blood sanctified the altar (Exod 29:12). Blood set aside the priests (Exod 29:20). Blood made atonement for God’s people (Exod 30:10). Blood sealed the new covenant (Matt 26:28). Blood justifies us (Rom 5:9). Through blood we have redemption (Eph 1:7). Through blood we have peace with God (Col 1:20). Blood cleanses us (Heb 9:14, 1 John 1:7). By blood we enter God’s holy place (Heb 10:19). By blood we are sanctified (Heb 13:12). Blood enables us to overcome Satan (Rev 12:11).

⁸ Cf. Lev 3:17; 7:2-27; 19:26; Deut 12:1-24; 1 Sam 14:32-34.

⁹ R. Kent Hughes, *Genesis: Beginning & Blessing* (Wheaton, IL: Crossway, 2004), 145.

¹⁰ It is stated most emphatically, “I will require your lifeblood.” “Require” (*darash*) is a judicial term, and God is the Judge who requires the payment for the breaking of His laws (cf. Rom 12:19). The debt is always paid, too.

¹¹ Bruce K. Waltke, *Genesis: A Commentary* (Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 2001), 145.

¹² See NET Study Bible.

¹³ Kaiser comments, “It is likewise too much to assert that ‘the shedding of blood’ be taken merely as a metaphor for death. Most frequently the concept of pouring was a physical act; its metaphoric usages were reserved for such ideas as the pouring out of the wrath of God or the pouring out of one’s heart or soul. But when blood was poured out in a violent way, that outpouring was said to pollute the land (Num 35:33; 2 Kings 24:4; Ezek 22:3-4). It is this pouring out of blood that constitutes the single most frequent use of this verb. It is hardly a metaphoric usage. No picture of violent death could be more graphically depicted.” Walter C. Kaiser, *Hard Sayings of the Bible* (Downers Grove, IL: InterVarsity, 1997 [1996]), Electronic Ed.

¹⁴ This passage sheds some interesting light on the controversial subject of abortion. There have been 42 million abortions since Roe vs. Wade. Mother Theresa: “The most dangerous place in the world is a mother’s womb.” If the life of man is in the blood (Gen 9:4; Lev 17:11) and man is not to shed innocent blood. If a fetus, no matter how small, has lifeblood in it. Then, to destroy a fetus is to shed innocent blood and is therefore unquestionably an act of premeditated murder, deserving the prescribed penalty of death.”

¹⁵ Waltke, *Genesis*, 143.

¹⁶ But it is important to recognize that this is not the primary purpose. If this was the case, why would God require the death of an animal who killed a man? (Gen 9:5).

¹⁷ John H. Walton, *Genesis* (Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 2001), 357.

¹⁸ God made provision for those who accidentally killed another in the cities of refuge (cf. Deut 19:1ff).

¹⁹ The human government and the governors that existed previously—as in the city, which Cain established (Gen 4:17), or in the case of the mighty men (6:4)—existed solely on human authority. Now, however, divine authority was conferred on human government to exercise oversight over those who lived under its jurisdiction.

²⁰ Jesus seems to have accepted the principle of capital punishment when he reminded Pilate that government was divinely conferred (John 19:11). The same position is elsewhere supported in the NT by Rom 13:4 and Acts 25:11.

²¹ Kaiser, *Hard Sayings of the Bible*, Electronic ed.

²² Every biblical covenant has an accompanying sign. Noah: Rainbow (Gen 9:12-17); Abraham: Circumcision (Gen 17:7-14); Moses: Sabbath (Exod 19:5-6; 24:7-8; 31:12-17); David: Virgin birth (Ps 89:3-4, 28-29; 132:11-12; Isa 7:14; 9:6-7; Jer 33:19-22, 25-26); and New Covenant: Blood (Jer 31:31-37).

²³ Sailhamer writes, "...the author is intentionally drawing out the similarities between God's covenant with Noah and the covenant at Sinai. Why? The answer that best fits with the author's purposes is that he wants to show that God's covenant at Sinai is not a new act of God. The covenant is rather a return to God's original promises. Once again at Sinai, as he had done in the past, God is at work restoring his fellowship with man and bringing man back to himself. The covenant with Noah plays an important role in the author's development of God's restoration of blessing. It lies midway between God's original blessing of all mankind (1:28) and God's promise to bless 'all peoples on the earth' through Abraham (12:1-3)." John H. Sailhamer, *Genesis: EBC* (Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 1990), Electronic ed.

²⁴ Waltke, *Genesis*, 146.

²⁵ There may have been rainbows before this pronouncement.

²⁶ Allen P. Ross, *Creation & Blessing* (Grand Rapids: Baker, 2002 [1988]), 40.

²⁷ Heb. *zakar* = "to be mindful or to recount." The verb "remember" is used frequently to describe God's faithfulness to His covenant promises. Ross, *Creation & Blessing*, 207.

²⁸ It is interesting to note the fact that the rainbow is not designed so much for man's benefit but for God's. Perhaps there is a play here on the verbs "see" and "remember." The flood story began with God "seeing" (Gen 6:5, 12) the unrestrained evil in the world. It ends with God "seeing" the rainbow. The flood story reaches a turning point when God "remembers" Noah (8:1). It reaches a climactic point when he "remembers" his covenant. Walter A. Elwell, ed., *Evangelical Commentary on the Bible* (Grand Rapids: Baker, 1989), Electronic Ed.

²⁹ Scripture associates a rainbow with God's glory, once to speak of His brightness (Ezek 1:28) and once to describe the light around His throne (Rev 4:3).