

Genesis 9:1-29! Foundational reaffirmations: God promises to be with us and to bless us!

This is the conclusion and climax to the story of Noah. This is the fourth and final chapter that concludes the lengthy story of Noah describing how God spared Noah and his family from a terrible and destructive calamity that destroyed everyone else on this earth. This story which Moses stretched out to cover four chapters (or perhaps 40% of the content of the first eleven chapters) is an indication of the importance of the story as a being perceived as a framework for appreciating the upcoming story of the patriarchs. The story of Noah is valuable to us in providing understanding of key ideas related to Noah: grace, righteousness, walking with God, and humanity being found created in the image of God. Besides addressing these key theological concerns, I believe that the complete story of Noah is an important foundational story disclosing key insight concerning God, God's character, God's intentions and plans for humanity. This last chapter, in particular, addresses these last concerns. Let us take a look!

I. God reinstates humanity's core mandate (vs. 1, 7) The first and last verse of this section basically declare the same injunction by God to Noah and his sons. God said ***"Be fruitful and multiply and fill the earth."*** (vs. 1) The concluding verse (vs. 7) repeats this injunction once again saying ***"and you be fruitful and multiply, teem on the earth and multiply in it."*** This is an example of the literary device known as an inclusio. The two almost identical statements function to bracket or frame the material found between the two so-called book ends. Everything in between the two book ends must be kept in mind and understood in light of the core statement given at the beginning and ending of this unit.

A. Be Fruitful & Rule the earth on my behalf. This statement contained in the two bracketing verses express the main idea of the first seven verses. These verses declare overall that God has given humanity the responsibility to manage everything on this earth¹ and rule once again on his behalf. This core statement given by God to Noah and his sons signifies a renewal of the original core charge given to both Adam and Eve in Genesis. Listen once again to what God said in the beginning to the original pair of humanity. *"So God created man in his own image in the image of God he created him; male and female he created them." "And God blessed them. And God said to them "Be fruitful and multiply and fill the earth and subdue it and have dominion over ...every living thing."*² The imperative command that God now gives to Noah and his descendants (his sons) is meant to be seen as corresponding almost identically to the core charge given to the first pair of humans. **Significance?** Noah represents a second Adam. The mandate and its accompanying commands signal both a new beginning and renewal of God's intentions for humanity.³ Remember, the original commission to Adam and Eve included the two main ideas of multiplication and dominion. The renewed charge, likewise, has these same two main ideas. The renewed charge also includes the key idea of having dominion over and subduing the earth, even though explicitly only the "be fruitful aspect" is explicitly mentioned. What is the support for my assertion? Implicitly, God gives this responsibility for dominion over the whole earth, including all living beings, by his amplifying comments and instructions regarding food found in the following two verses. (Gen. 9:2-3)

¹ Wenham, Gordon Genesis 1-15 Word Biblical Commentary 1987 p. 30 See especially Wenham, Gordon Story as Torah p.25 Baker Academics 2000.

² Gen. 1:27-28

³ Hamilton, Victor P The Book of Genesis Chapters 1-17 1990 p.313

God says to Noah “*into your hands **they are (given) or delivered.***”(vs.2) And once again in verse three God says to Noah “*As I gave you the green plants,(for food) **I give you everything.***” Do not miss this main point! Yes, God gives the animals to mankind for food, but the even bigger principle is that God has **given the whole earth to humanity to manage and have dominion** over because humans- male and female are created in the image of God.

B. The Commission is Restated, but with Modifications. (vs. 2-6) The renewed commission is at its core identical to the original commission given to both Adam and Eve. It is the same, but with a couple of changes that should be noted and compared with the original contract that was made between God and Adam and Eve. **First Change:** Permission granted to eat animals for food. “*everything that lives shall be food for you.*” (vs.3). This permission is different from pre flood days where both humans and animals seemed to consume only plants for food.⁴ Permission is given to eat animals; yet, with a very strong restriction. “*You shall not eat flesh (animal) with its life, that is its **blood.***” (vs.4) This last point, which is almost a throw away point, is the main basis or ground for the narrator’s second main point in these verses: *Be very careful not to shed the blood-the life- of another human being.*

Second Change: Be careful not to shed the blood of another human being. (vs. 5-6). I think it is very interesting that this prohibition is similar to the prohibition that God gave Adam and Eve. God gave Adam and Eve very broad authority to explore and manage their lives on this earth. Yet at the same time, God gave them one prohibition⁵. Here God gives two prohibitions attached to their otherwise broad sweeping **freedom to manage the earth without restrictions.** In these two verses God explicitly prohibits any being human or animal from taking the life of a human. Why? God tells us the core reason: “*humans are made in the image of God.*” (vs.6) This is an essential aspect of our identity that sets us apart from even the animals- some of whom are so much like us. The seriousness of this specific command is worth noting. Three times in these two verse God warns both animals and humans that “*He will require an accounting or reckoning by anyone who sheds the life of another human.*” Take note and remember that this command along with its warning not to shed the life of another human being is given by God in the context the overall broader charge to go forth into the earth and manage it on God’s behalf.

II.Reaffirmation of God’s Covenant to Noah and his family. (vs. 8-17) This middle section of ten verses helps the narrator conclude the story of Noah. In this second section the narrator wants us to see something significant about Noah’s life that the original generation of hearers under Moses and us need to know and remember. **God remembered Noah!** We saw this central truth last week! This is true and worth remembering. But this section looks forward to life after the flood. This section affirms a central truth about God and how God relates to His people now and then that we must always keep in mind. This middle section of ten verses is focused once again on the central topic of God’s covenant with Noah. Twice in this section the narrator affirms **that God will confirm his covenant to Noah and his family.** In addition to God himself promising directly to Noah and his sons that He will keep his promises and covenant to them, God declares three times that He will give Noah and his descendants a “**sign**” –some tangible visible reminder that He will keep his promises-his covenant with them going forward. Why

⁴ Gen. 1: 29-30

⁵ Do not eat the fruit from the tree of the knowledge of good and evil. (Gen. 2:17)

does God go to such extreme measures to support or strengthen what he has already said or promised? Let us take a look!

A. God promises to keep, accomplish, or confirm what has already been established. The NIV, ESV, and other English translations⁶ incorrectly miss the main point of the text. The NIV and ESV for example both convey the idea that God is **establishing a covenant for the first time**. “Behold, I establish my covenant with you and your offspring after you.” (vs. 9, 11)⁷ Rather, here just like it was previously reported that God on the eve of the massive flood, that God is promising to Noah and future generations **to confirm or keep his promises to them**. What is God promising! The immediate and core promise that God is promising Noah is “never again to destroy the world by a massive flood. (vs.11). But, here is a Hugh Rutledge question! Is that all that God is promising Noah? The answer is no! I believe the promise to never to destroy the world is indeed central to what God is promising to Noah, but that specific promise alone does not suffice to convey the full content of what God is promising! So what then is also included in the statement: “*But I will confirm or keep my covenant to you and your descendants.*”? Answer! The foundational promise that God gave to Adam, to Eve, to Cain, to Isaac, to Jacob, to Abraham, and to all of God’s people for all generations. What is God’s foundational promise to each and every one of God’s children? **God will be with us as we journey through this life on this earth**. God promise to all of us **is to be with us and to bless** each and every one of us! This is the main foundational promise of God’s covenant to Noah here.⁸

B. God gives Noah a guarantee and reminder of His Promise. God renews his commission to humanity through Noah. God also reassures Noah that life on this earth from this point on, once again looks very hopeful on this dry planet. Amazingly, God tacks on a sign – **a tangible concrete reminder and pledge that God means business**. God can be trusted by Noah and by all humans going forward. Three times God tells Noah that He will give him a “sign of the covenant”. God tells Noah what the sign is: “I have set may bow in the clouds” Several commentators have said that the bow is the same word for used for the bow (an ancient weapon used in battle) as well as for a rainbow. Interesting! What is interesting also is God telling Noah the purpose of the sign : “ When I see the bow in the clouds, I will remember the everlasting covenant.” Does God forget what he promises? Does God need a reminder? Perhaps not! Point: God gives us this tangible reminder so that we remember what He has promised us. Whether it is the sign of circumcision (Gen. 17:11), the Lord’s supper, or any other sign that He personally gives us, **functions to remind us that God** has and will be faithful to his promises and covenant made to us.

III. Portrait of Noah: He walked with God. He was righteous, but a flawed individual. He was in need of grace like us. (18-29) This third and final unit which is comprised of twelve verses is the final conclusion to the story of Noah. The modern reader anticipates that hopefully this ending to the story will provide some supporting details describing how God was with Noah and how God

⁶ ESV and NIV for example

⁷ Wenham once again citing Deut. 9:5, 2Sam. 7:25, Gen. 26:3 argues convincingly that the idea is to confirm what previously has been promised p. 175

⁸ See Gen . 26:2-3 God appears to Isaac and gives him commands prefaced by saying to Isaac “ and I will be with you and will bless you. See the same promise given to Jacob in Gen. 28:15

blessed Noah and his family during the 350 years that Noah lived “after the flood”.⁹ Taken at face value, 350 years is a very long period of human history. It would be reasonable to expect the story teller to provide a few details of how Noah and his family expanded and populated the new earth. Not really!¹⁰ Perhaps the author would provide a more exact location of where post flood civilization emerged, rather than merely inferring that it was somewhere in the vicinity of the mountain range of Ararat.¹¹ Nothing! Or how about the city that Noah presumably established along with his sons. Nothing! Or what about advances made to civilization as even provided concerning the descendants of Cain. Nothing! So in these twelve concluding verses what details or lesson does the author choose to go with for his concluding portrait of Noah? Simply an instance of recklessness by Noah is focused upon. The author concludes with narrating one brief episode- a misstep- an act of indiscretion-an act of foolishness that caused his own son to sin- which in turn may have contributed to future generations of some of his descendants to be adversely affected. The following concluding verses focus upon Noah’s intoxication, his indiscreet act of lying naked in his tent, the two different responses from his sons, and the consequent concluding but different blessings on his sons.

- A. Noah’s post flood sin. Noah got drunk or became intoxicated.** Noah’s sin was not drinking wine. He was not censored for that.¹² Noah is not censored for planting a vineyard. We are not told the reason that what happens next was particularly wrong or sinful. We are just told what happened in a typical day of Noah’s life. “*He drank of the wine and became drunk and lay uncovered (naked) in his tent.*” Pay attention to what happens next. Let us look for clues that could help us see the point of the story being told. Even though we are not told that something is explicitly wrong (Ham’s response vs. Shem/Japheth’s response to their father’s nakedness) the writer does lead us believe that one response one set of brothers is acceptable-the other response by Ham is not. Let us take a look
- B. Noah’s state of intoxication leads to an indiscreet, but not an immoral act.** Noah becomes drunk. What happens next? Does he kill somebody? No! Does he crash his car and hurt somebody? No! So what happens? He lies naked exposing himself in his tent! Is this immoral? No! But, this act of indiscretion leads to someone else committing a wrong! Ham the youngest son sins against his father! How by not honoring or respecting his father!¹³ You may ask how did Ham- the youngest son dishonor his Dad? Ham dishonored his Dad, by not doing precisely what his two older brothers did indeed do! They covered up his nakedness, so as not to have any other person see what Noah in his state of intoxication had foolishly done to himself. This may seem strange to us moderns, but this is what is what the narrator draws attention to by the behavior of Shem and Japheth. “*they cover their eyes so they do not see their Dad naked.*” They walk awkwardly backwards holding a blanket so as to cover their Dad’s nakedness. Point: They try to avoid seeing their Dad’s nakedness. Ham did not! He sees and wants his brothers to see “what their Dad foolishly did” This was not right. The older brothers on the other hand did do what was right. They sought to preserve the dignity of their Dad.

⁹ Hugh is a textbook editor. Confirm this point with him.

¹⁰ Verse 19 tells us that from Noah’s three sons the whole earth (population) were dispersed. See chapter 10.

¹¹ See comments by David Freeman on Chapter 8.

¹² See Psalm 104:15 God gave wine to humans as a gift to enjoy.

¹³ Hamilton’s viewpoint

C. Noah's sin may have affected future generations of his descendants. In the five concluding verses, Noah blesses two of his sons for their action of restraint. Noah in turn, curses Ham particularly Ham's son Canaan, for the lack of restraint that he showed. This section has raised all sorts of questions to interpreters for centuries. Perhaps the greatest problem that the text raises is why does Noah curse Canaan¹⁴ and not Ham directly? I do not know! But, if we take a close look at the blessings to Shem and Japheth alongside of the curses to Canaan, we may get a possible clue toward what is going on here. Overall, Noah was both commending the prudent behavior of two brothers and censoring the indiscreet action by the younger brother Ham. Furthermore, the outcome anticipated by both the projected and desired blessing on all three sons is rather vague and general. Noah prays or seeks God to bless-by enlarging territory and to grant prosperity to the two older brothers and their descendants for their actions. Overall, I do not see the curse on Canaan as particularly dooming the line of descendants to a state of miserable existence.

¹⁴ See Gen. 9: 25-27