

Genesis 9: Biblical Reading and Reflections

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- [0 : 00] Genesis chapter 9 Genesis chapter 9 And God said,
This is the sign of the covenant that I make between me and you and every living creature that is with you for all future generations. I have set my bow in the cloud, and it shall be a sign of the covenant between me and the earth.
When I bring clouds over the earth, and the bow is seen in the clouds, I will remember my covenant that is between me and you and every living creature of all flesh. And the waters shall never again become a flood to destroy all flesh.
When the bow is in the clouds, I shall see it, and remember the everlasting covenant between God and every living creature of all flesh that is on the earth. God said to Noah, The sons of Noah who went forth from the ark were Shem, Ham, and Japheth.
Ham was the father of Canaan. These three were the sons of Noah, and from these the people of the whole earth were dispersed. Noah began to be a man of the soil, and he planted a vineyard.
- [2 : 32] He drank of the wine and became drunk, and lay uncovered in his tent. And Ham, the father of Canaan, saw the nakedness of his father, and told his two brothers outside.
Then Shem and Japheth took a garment, laid it on both their shoulders, and walked backward, and covered the nakedness of their father. Their faces were turned backward, and they did not see their father's nakedness.
When Noah awoke from his wine, and knew what his youngest son had done to him, he said, Cursed be Canaan, a servant of servants shall he be to his brothers.
He also said, Blessed be the Lord, the God of Shem, and let Canaan be his servant. May God enlarge Japheth, and let him dwell in the tents of Shem, and let Canaan be his servant.
After the flood, Noah lived 350 years. All the days of Noah were 950 years, and he died. The story of the flood is a story of decreation and recreation.
- [3 : 35] The original creation narrative is a story of a world formed out of water. The earth is void and formless. Darkness is over the face of the deep. The Spirit of God is hovering over the face of the waters.
And God separates the waters, the waters above, from the waters beneath. He draws the land out of the waters, and gradually forms a world out of the waters.
In the story of the flood, we see the world restored to its original chaotic and void and formless shape. The world is being broken down. The fountains of the deep are opened up.
The heavens are opened up. And we see this division between the waters above and the waters beneath no longer existing. The waters that were once separated have now been brought back together.
In the story of chapter 8 and 9 of Genesis, we see various allusions to this. We see allusions to the deep. We see allusions to the wind on the surface of the waters.

[4 : 39] We see references to the land drying out. And all of these draw our attention back to Genesis chapter 1. And then the earth is populated.

First of all, birds are sent out. Then we have the animals being sent out and man going out into the creation. And at the beginning of chapter 9, we see very similar statements to the ones that we find after the creation of man and the animals in chapter 1 of Genesis.

Be fruitful and multiply and fill the earth. But there's a change here. Man is now told that the fear of you and the dread of you will be upon every beast of the earth and upon every bird of the heavens, upon everything that creeps on the ground and all the fish of the sea.

They've been delivered into humanity's hands. Now many have seen in this, and I think there's reason to believe this is the case, that at this point man is given the right to eat animals.

And man did not eat animals beforehand. Man was vegetarian. Man was existing within a garden setting originally. And then out in the world in a weaker state. But now man has the power to rule over the world.

[5 : 46] And with that greater power of rule and authority over the animals comes the right to eat animals. As man is given the green plants at the very beginning, so man is given animals to eat.

But yet there is a taboo, a restriction. And that is not to eat animals with their blood. In part, this is an expression of the fact that the animals belong to God alone.

That when man eats animals, we're not eating animals as those who have a natural right to take whatever life we want, but as those who have received this right from God, to whom all things belong.

Who gives life and breath to all things, and then gives the right to take certain life into our hands. There's a reckoning that will be required of us, of the life that we take.

First of all, we cannot take animal life and dispose of it however we will. The prohibition on eating blood expresses this. But there's also a judgment that comes upon those who take the life of man.

[6 : 51] So we can take the life of other creatures, but to take the life of man is to take the life of one who has been created in the image of God. And God will hold such a person responsible.

The judgment that's carried out upon the person who takes the life of another man is one that expresses on the one hand the dignity of every human being made in the image of God, but also the dignity of human beings as those who share the dominion of God.

By man shall his blood be shed, for God made man in his own image. In part, that may be an expression of the fact that since God has made man in his own image, man has the right to judge other men on account of their breaking of God's law, to act on God's behalf, and to take the life of other human beings in these acts of judgment.

We can think about the way in which, in principle, every judgment that we have, whether that's taking a particular fine from someone, or whether it's putting someone in prison for a number of years, or whether it's even the death penalty, all of these arise from this fundamental principle that life can be taken by other men as an expression of the authority that God has given to his representatives, to his vice-guerants.

Man is called to go out into the creation to be fruitful and multiply, to increase greatly upon the earth and multiply upon it. And God establishes a covenant with humanity at this point, with Noah and his descendants, and with every living creature that is with them.

[8 : 23] And the covenant is that he will never again cut off flesh by the waters of the flood. There will never be this decreation event of the same type. This is accompanied by a sign, which is the rainbow in the heavens.

And God promises on this account that he will not judge the earth in the same way again, that the judgment is finished, it's over. And as we think about the parallels between the original creation and the decreation and recreation of the world in the flood, this is a further connection, that the covenant and the sign of the covenant as the rainbow correspond with the day of the Sabbath.

It's God's rest, it's his blessing, and it's his determination that the act is finished, that he's no longer going to judge in this particular way. God hangs up his war bow in the clouds.

The act is finished, and now human life can continue according to its regular patterns. There's an everlasting covenant that's established in this way.

Following the original creation story, there is a second account of God's forming of the man from the earth, the creation of a garden, and all the events that occur within the garden, most particularly the fall.

[9 : 39] And we see a recapitulation of that pattern here. Noah began to be a man of the soil. Now, the word for soil there is the same word as the Adamah from which Adam was formed.

So Noah is playing out the Adam pattern here. He plants a vineyard just as God planted a garden in Eden. He drinks of the wine and became drunk and lay uncovered in his tent.

Think, he takes of the fruit of the tree, he eats it, he has a change in his state, and he's found naked. And so it's the pattern of the fall playing out again.

And at this point, the son Ham, the father of Canaan, sees the nakedness of his father and tells the two brothers. And then the brothers act in a righteous, honorable manner.

They take in the garment from outside and they cover him up. Now, there are many questions about what this involves. What does it mean that he uncovers the nakedness of his father?

[10 : 37] In the book of Leviticus, we see the sexual relation with the mother as being an act of uncovering the nakedness of the father. So some have suggested this is incest with the wife of Noah and that Canaan is the result of that illicit union.

Others have suggested it's an act of homosexual rape of the father. And both of those suggestions, I think, fail to reckon fully with the fact of the actions of Shem and Japheth, the way that they put the garment over their father, that the key concern seems to be covering over the nakedness of the father.

The point of Ham's action is to usurp his father's authority. Whatever is involved here, that seems to be what is at issue. Shem and Japheth restore their father's dignity and ensure that they do not seek to attack or undermine his authority.

Noah wakes, he realizes what has been done to him and then he summons his sons and he judges them. He judges Ham's son in particular. Cursed be Canaan, a servant of servants shall he be to his brothers.

And here we should see a parallel with the judgment upon the serpent, which suggests maybe that part of Ham's purpose was to subvert his father's authority by getting his brothers in, to tempt them to act against the father's authority.

[12 : 03] Think back to the sin of the serpent in the Garden of Eden. The serpent tries to undermine the authority of the father. He tries to declare the promise that Adam and Eve will become like gods, knowing good and evil, that God is holding this back against them and that they should join with him in his rebellion.

And Ham's action seems to be quite similar. He usurps authority and he seeks to get his brothers to turn against the father too. And as a judgment for his action, his son is reduced in status.

And so his son becomes a servant of servant to his brothers, which is similar to the way that the serpent is judged from among the beasts.

He's cursed above all the beasts. On the other hand, whereas we see judgments carried out upon the serpent, Adam and Eve in Genesis chapter 3, here the two brothers, Shem and Japheth, resist the temptation.

They clothe their father's nakedness and here they are blessed. Blessed be the Lord, the God of Shem and let Canaan be his servant. May God enlarge Japheth and let him dwell in the tents of Shem and let Canaan be his servant.

[13 : 20] And so they are given authority over the son of the figure who's associated with the serpent. So the seed of the serpent figure in this narrative is going to serve the righteous seed, those who stand up for the father and for his honour.

After the flood, Noah lives 350 years or 300 years and 50 years. All the days of Noah are 950 years and he died. I've previously observed a parallel between the age of Noah after the flood and the dimensions of the ark.

So the ark is 300 cubits by 50 cubits. After the flood, Noah lives 300 years and 50 years. So there's an ark type character to Noah himself.

Noah is the ark of humanity. He and his children within him are the ones that will be born through the flood and it's because of his righteousness and the grace that he finds in the eyes of God that humanity is saved.

And the complete years of his life are 950 years. What we're seeing within this chapter then is a recapitulation, first of all, of the original creation, then of the events of the garden and then of the judgment, the fall and the curse upon the serpent.

[14 : 40] But in this case, there's a blessing upon the two people who resist the temptation. One question. Noah is a new head of humanity.

Adam was the original head of humanity. He's the one that was first created from whom all descended. But Noah is a new Adam. He's one who's also a man of the soil, a man of the Adamah.

He's the one who also is within a vineyard. And he plays out many of the similar patterns that we see in the story of Adam. He also, in some sense, rules over the animals.

But there seem to be forms of progression too. So the question that I want you to think about is the way or the ways in which Noah represents a movement beyond, a progression beyond, or maturation beyond the figure of Adam.

And what might be the significance to that development?