

**The Covenant of Preservation**  
**Genesis 6:17-22, 8:20-22, 9:1-17**

Friends, we've all done something that we regret haven't we. It might have been something insignificant like sleeping in for an extra twenty minutes and regretting it because you hit an unexpected traffic jam on the way to work, or something very significant like quitting an old job for a new one and regretting it once you discovered all the extra time this new job requires of you.

And speaking of regret - it was quite obvious from all the posts on social media over this past year that Christians were regretting all the hype and attention they had given to the making of the movie Noah, once they saw what the directors had done with this movie.

We all thought this was going to be a presentation of the biblical story that would emphasize Judeo-Christian values and theology, but it turned out to be a disappointing fantasy film that put a gnostic spin on the story of Noah and relied heavily on special effects instead.

And this was such a colossal disappoint to the Christian community because so many people have learned this story, and even if they haven't studied all the nuances and details in it, they know enough of it to expect that it's a story about what God is doing and how God acts to save Noah and his family from catastrophic judgment.

But friends, what happened with the movie Noah is the perfect example for illustrating how Covenant sets the context for correctly understanding our relationship with God, and indeed for correctly understanding the story of the scripture.

Take the story of Noah – or any biblical story in the Old or New Testament out of the context of Covenant and frame it with some other worldview such as Gnosticism, secular humanism, post-modernism and you get something very different.

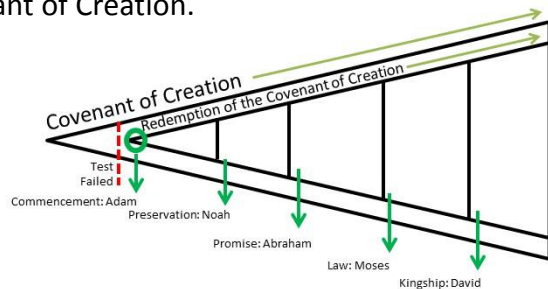
In fact if you want to understand how the story of scripture moves along, if you want to know what is the organizing principle behind all this material that was written over thousands of years and

compiled by the Holy Spirit - it is how things move along and transition from one covenant administration to the next.

And the story of Noah is really the story of how things must transition out of the Covenant of Commencement and why God introduces a new administration - the Covenant of Preservation.

And if that sounds a bit confusing, I've modified our covenant diagram to show how God's plan to restore Creation goes through different covenant administrations.

And what we see is that the Covenants that God makes with Adam, Noah, Abraham, Moses, David... they are all different but connected administrations of God's intention to redeem the Covenant of Creation.



So let's look at how that comes about. Now if you remember, in the Covenant of Commencement God had decreed there would be two kinds of people from that point on, the offspring of the woman and the offspring of the serpent - right?

Well in Genesis chapter 4 we see the development of the offspring of the serpent in the line of Cain, as he murders his brother.

The scripture then lists seven generations of Cain's descendants to show how the line serpent comes to its fullest expression of rebellion against God in Lamech, who was a violent polygamist.

The line of the serpent: Adam - Cain - Enoch - Irad - Mehujael - Methushael - Lamech.

And Lamech "the violent" has three sons; Jabal, Jubal and Tubal Cain who play a significant role in developing agriculture, music, and tool making for civilization.

Then the contrasting line of the offspring of the woman are listed in chapter 5; Adam - Seth – Enosh – Kenan – Mahalalel – Jarad - Enoch – Methuselah – Lamech – Noah.

You'll notice the similarity in names – which is meant to invite us to compare and contrast the differences between these two lines.

So in the line of the serpent the 7<sup>th</sup> descendent, Lamech, is portrayed as the fullest expression of sinful rebellion in contrast with the line of the woman where the 7<sup>th</sup> descendent, Enoch, is revealed as the fullest expression of covenant faithfulness, vs. 24 says that *“Enoch walked faithfully with God; then he was no more, because God took him away.”* (5:24)

We can also see the contrast between the two “Lamechs” in what they say. The “bad” Lamech boast of his violence that intimidates others, (4:23-24) whereas the “good” Lamech prophesies about his son Noah saying *“He will comfort us in the labor and painful toil of our hands caused by the ground the Lord has cursed.”* (5:29)

So, there are two lines of people inhabiting the world and we can see the contrast and the difference between them in terms of their faithfulness to the Covenant with God.

Now the prophecy about Noah is an indication that way that God relates to humanity is about to change – there is going to be a transition to a new covenant administration, and as chapter 6 starts, verses 1-5 reveal why this is going to take place.

It says *“The LORD (Yahweh) saw how great the wickedness of the human race had become on the earth, and that every inclination of the thoughts of the human heart was only evil all the time.”* (vs. 5)

Now remember – we need to understand “wickedness and evil” in light of the context of Covenant – even more so because this verse uses the Covenant name of God – Yahweh.

So the wickedness and evil that humanity was focused on must first understood in terms of how the Covenant of Creation had

been violated – in the tasks of imaging God to the creation in male female marriage, ruling over the creation and taking Sabbath rest.

God sees that the human race is deliberately turning away from this and celebrating the curses He placed on them, using them as motivation to further rebel against Him and develop civilization and culture, instead of walking faithfully with Him as Enoch had.

So if we ask what the scripture defines “wickedness and evil” to be – this is where the definition starts. Yes, eventually these violations lead to things like murder, polygamy, and all sorts of abominations that we would typically think of when we say “wickedness” - but this is where it starts.

It works the same way later on when we try to understand what God means when He says to Noah that the earth is full of “violence” because of the human race.

“Violence” in this sense comes from the “violation” of the terms and conditions of the Covenant. So when a Covenant is broken friends – it’s not an abstract offence where no one gets hurt.

Violating a Covenant is violence against God, and leads to violence against each other and against the creation. Thus it is as God said *“the earth is full of violence because of them”*

And when God surveys the human race and takes stock what has become of His good creation and his efforts to restore the Covenant of Creation - we come across a shocking revelation... chapter 6:6 says *“The LORD regretted that he had made human beings on the earth, and his heart was deeply troubled.”*

Pause for a second friends and let that sink in.

Scripture tell us that at this point - God regretted having made us. That’s why I started off talking about regrets; if you have ever come to regret something that you have done – especially something that you intended to be for good, a situation where you wanted to help someone out, and then in spite of your good intentions that person just manages to twist everything you’ve done and make a complete mess of it all – and you look at where things are at and you feel frustration, anger, resentment, sorrow all rolled up into one and all you can say is “I really regret getting involved with you.”

That's where God is at with the human race in Genesis 6:6.

And when you are at that point friends, you don't simply continue what you've been doing do you? Something is going to change – you're going to walk away, withdraw support, fire the person – but things won't stay the way they are.

*And so God says "I will wipe from the face of the earth the human race I have created—and with them the animals, the birds and the creatures that move along the ground—for I regret that I have made them." (vs. 7)*

Now I know we've taken a bit of time to lay out all the details that lead up to the story of Noah, but it's important because without understanding what leads to this situation God just comes off looking like a capricious deity who is about to do something horrific, and we get people posting nasty memes on Facebook.

And I think that part of why God's heart was deeply troubled with His regrets friends, not just because human wickedness would twist His actions of judgment and malign His character in due time...

But also because He had bound himself to restore the covenant of creation – when He pronounced in the covenant of commencement that one of the offspring of the woman would crush the head of the serpent – and if God were to truly wipe out all humanity, this promise would become impossible, God would have gone back on His Word – and He can't do that.

And this is something that we will see at each stage of the covenant friends, a situation where God is confronted with a dilemma in which doing right by the Covenant will put Him in a situation of negating His promises.

And the interesting parts of scripture... and what provides us with the details for this particular story, is how God comes up with and puts into effect a solution which honors the Covenants and also fulfills His promises.

In this case the solution is to preserve a descendant of "the seed of the woman" and to establish, re-establish the covenant with Him – that way God does right by the Covenant and keep His promise.

So God reveals His intentions to Noah and says *“I am going to bring floodwaters on the earth to destroy all life under the heavens, every creature that has the breath of life in it. Everything on earth will perish. But I will establish my covenant with you, and you will enter the ark—you and your sons and your wife and your sons’ wives with you.”* (Gen 6:17-18)

And the remainder of the story of Noah is about how God does this – and what we want to look at is what happens as God establishes – or re-establishes His Covenant with Noah.

So friends, let’s review the definition of a Covenant once again - it is a Bond, that deals with life and death which is sovereignly administered.

So we see this is still a Bond. While God will going to sever His covenant bond with the rest of humanity by destroying them in a flood – he will continue a formal bond with Noah and his family by sparing them from the judgment and He declares that this will be so.

And we see that it still deals with life and death, in the most obvious of ways that Noah’s life is spared from death in the flood, but also afterwards when God says to Noah and his family may eat the animals for food.

Additionally God commands them to take the life of a murdered, and when God promises to uphold the seasons of the earth as they relate to planting and harvesting for the food that sustains life.

And it is still sovereignly administered. It is God who decides to spare Noah, it’s not Noah crying out to God to be spared. It is God who determines how to modify the prior Covenant, it’s not done in consultation or negotiation with Noah, and it is God who decides to use the rainbow as the sign of this Covenant, to remind humanity of what happened and the meaning behind it all, and finally it is God who determines that this will be an everlasting Covenant.

And so as we look at what God is doing in establishing or re-establishing His Covenant with Noah, we can characterize it as a Covenant of Preservation.

So in this respect God is first and foremost preserving one of the offspring of the Woman, Noah so that one day, one of his descendants will crush the head of the Serpent.

And when the flood is over and God has dealt with His regret, He says *“Never again will I curse the ground because of humans, even though every inclination of the human heart is evil from childhood.”* God will preserve the earth from any further judgment on his part, to give His redemptive plan the time and space it needs to be developed and worked out.

Additionally when God speaks to Noah and his family we hear echoes of the Covenant of Creation, and Commencement... *“Be fruitful and increase in number and fill the earth.... and everything that lives and moves about will be food for you. Just as I gave you the green plants, I now give you everything”* So, God is preserving both the curses and the blessings of the prior Covenants.

And, given the track record of the human race prior to the flood, God institutes what some might call “natural justice” to preserve human life. He says *“Whoever sheds human blood, by humans shall their blood be shed; for in the image of God has God made mankind” (8:6)*

Finally, God wants all of Noah’s descendants to understand what has happened between Himself and the human race, so God creates a sign for this Covenant – the rainbow.

And this sign will appear whenever it rains and it will preserve the memory and meaning of what had happened in the flood and it will assure future generations of Noah’s descendants that God is committed to preserving the world from His judgment – in order to bring about the restoration of Creation.

And this is how the whole story comes and connects to us – when we see the rainbow in the sky it is to be understood as a reminder of the Covenant of Preservation.

So we are to remember that God is committed to withholding righteous judgment that would wipe us out, so that His plan to restore the Covenant of Creation has the time and space needed to be brought to its consummation.

And friends, how we respond to this reality reveals something about the kind of people we are – whether we are offspring of the woman or whether we are offspring of the serpent.

In the same way that we see the difference between cats and where dogs say “you feed me, you play with me, you love me... you must be god!” and cats say “you feed me, you play with me, you love me... I must be god!”

In the same way those who are the offspring of the serpent say “*God is withholding judgment and preserving the earth... great! That obviously means He approves of everything we’re doing, or doesn’t care, or He doesn’t exist. Party on!*”

Whereas the offspring of the woman say “*God is withholding judgment and preserving the earth... wow how great is His*

*patience and longsuffering with us, how can we attempt to be faithful to Him and participate in His plan....”* See the difference?

And friends if you are seeking how to be faithful to God while He preserves this world from judgment... and now that you understand what God was, and is doing in the Covenant of Preservation – listen to the Apostle Paul’s words in Acts 17;

*“<sup>26</sup> From one man God made all the nations, that they should inhabit the whole earth; and he marked out their appointed times in history and the boundaries of their lands. <sup>27</sup> God did this so that they would seek him and perhaps reach out for him and find him, though he is not far from any one of us. <sup>28</sup> ‘For in him we live and move and have our being.’ As some of your own poets have said, ‘We are his offspring.’ <sup>29</sup> “Therefore since we are God’s offspring, we should not think that the divine being is like gold or silver or stone—an image made by human design and skill. <sup>30</sup> In the past God overlooked such ignorance, but now he commands all people everywhere to repent. <sup>31</sup> For he has set a day when he will judge the world with justice by the man he has appointed. He has given proof of this to everyone by raising him from the dead.”*



These words were originally spoken by Paul to the Greek philosophers who gathered on Mars Hill in the city of Athens, but hearing them now in the context of the Covenant of Preservation gives us a whole new appreciation to what Paul is saying here doesn't it!

Friends, the Covenant of Preservation means that there is still time for people to seek God, to perhaps reach out for him and find him.

This world is still being preserved from the final judgment when Jesus Christ will return and restore the Covenant of Creation and we can reveal the kind of people that we are by urging others to take advantage of this delay for repentance.

People need to be made aware of how we violate the Covenant of Creation, how we distort the image of God.

We need to help people understand that the pain of childbearing, dysfunction in marriage, conflict in male-female relationships, meaningless toil in work, how nature fights against us, our

eventual death... All these curses are the proof that we have each violated God's covenant of Creation.

But the rainbow is the good news – that's the sign that judgment has been delayed, that there is still time for making things right with God, especially now that we know God has provided a way to make things right with Him.

This is one whom God raised from the dead – our Lord Jesus Christ, and He has ascended into heaven and has been given all glory and power and authority and honor and He promised He will come back when God has determined the time of preservation has come to an end.

So Friends, God always does right by His covenants – yes He promised to preserve the earth from destructive judgment and He will keep that word – but do not think as some do - that this means He will put up with our Covenant violations and hold us blameless...

The rainbow reminds us that the flood foreshadows a greater judgment yet to come, as 2 Peter 3:6-7 says: *“the world of that time was deluged and destroyed. By the same word [the Covenant of preservation] the present heavens and earth are reserved for fire, being kept for the day of judgment and destruction of the ungodly.”*

But the good news friend is that for those who are in Jesus Christ – as Noah was in the Ark - the Covenant of preservation will never end!

God Word decreed this would be an everlasting Covenant - and in Jesus Christ – the Word made flesh - there is an everlasting life that can preserve us in the final judgment – which, true to God’s Covenant word will not destroy the world by water – but instead will purify it and restore it by fire!

All of our impurities, the sin which leads us to violate God’s Covenant will be burned away - and our life in Christ will be like gold - not consumed, but refined in the fire.

Friends there’s so much more that the Covenants have to say to us about our day to day life activities and how life in this world is and ought to be – but we need to stop here this morning and let what we’ve learned so far sink in and make us ready for what we have yet to learn...

So friends, there is still time... let us take advantage of it, for to squander this opportunity would be one thing that we would truly come to regret...

May we help as many people as we can preserve their lives in a Covenant relationship with God, Amen.