

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

Friends, we've all done things that we regret, haven't we. Maybe it was something significant – like a bad financial decision or a bad relationship decision...

Or maybe it was something small like forgetting to set your clock ahead a hour last night and then having to scramble to get to church on time... Or watching a horror movie – by yourself... when you are babysitting... in a big old country farmhouse...

Now, speaking of regretting a choice in movies, do you remember when Noah, starring Russel Crowe, came out in 2014?

All the churches were excited about a bible story getting some major exposure on the silver screen, and they threw their support behind the promotional campaign.

But after opening night - it was quite obvious from all the social media posts that Christians were regretting all the hype they had given in support of this movie.

Everyone expected it to be the familiar bible story about Noah that would emphasize Judeo-Christian values and theology... but no.

Instead the directors had produced a disappointing fantasy film which relied heavily on special effects and revisionist bible interpretations which completely changed the story.

So brothers and sisters, this is the perfect example of how Covenant sets the context to correctly understanding the scriptures... and our relationship with God.

If we take the story of Noah - or any other bible story out of the Covenant context, we will end up framing it with something else... we have to - because that's how we work.

If we get rid of a Covenant context, or we are not aware of the Covenant context, we will use some other worldview for context like progressivism, environmentalism, feminism, cultural Marxism... and that will make the story into something very different.

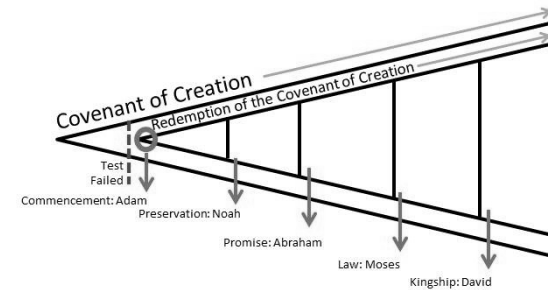
So brothers and sisters – reading the bible is a good start, but the bible doesn't want to be interpreted by whatever perspective you bring to it – It wants you read it and understand it from the its own perspective... and that is the Covenant.

In fact it is God's desire to save His original Covenant of Creation, which we learned about last week, and was broken by Adam and Eve, which underlines the development of the reality we live in and moves history along, right from Genesis to Revelation.

And the story of Noah is really the story of how God must transition out of the Covenant of Commencement he made with Adam and Eve after broke the original Covenant, why He must institute a new phase in His saving plan, which we call the Covenant of Preservation.

And if that sounds a bit confusing, here's a helpful diagram to show how God's plan to restore Creation goes through different covenant administrations – which is the context to properly understand scripture, because this is what the bible is about.

And the Covenants that God makes with Adam, Noah, Abraham, Moses, David are all different but still connected phases in God's plans to redeem the original Covenant of Creation.



So let's look at how this has developed so far. 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. (Gen 3:15)

Then in Genesis 4 we see Cain become the offspring of the serpent as he murders his brother and exiled in judgment.

The line of the serpent begins to grow as Cain marries, and has children. Seven generations of Cain's descendants are listed to show how the Serpent offspring comes to its fullest expression of rebellion against God in Lamech, who was a violent polygamist. (Gen 4:23)

So this is the line of the serpent in Gen 4: Adam - Cain - Enoch – Irad – Mehujael – Methushael- Lamech. And Lamech “the violent” has three sons; Jabal, Jubal and Tubal Cain who develop civilization with farming, music, tools.

Then in Gen 5, the offspring of the woman are contrasted: Seth – Enosh – Kenan – Mahalalel – Jarad - Enoch – Methuselah – Lamech – Noah.

Take notice of similar/duplicated names – this is how we know we are meant to compare and contrast these two lines.

So the 7th descendant in the line of the serpent is portrayed as the fullest expression of sinful rebellion, while the 7th descendent in the line of the woman 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.”*

And we see the “bad” Lamech make a boast of his violence that intimidates others, (4:23-24) while 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, we can see the contrast and difference between these two lines of people inhabiting the world in terms of their faithfulness in their Covenant relationship with God.

Now the prophecy about Noah is an indicator for us that there is going to be a change in the God relates to humanity – 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.”*

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 be 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, they are celebrating the curses He placed on them, they use them as motivation to further rebel against Him – taking two wives, developing civilization and culture to spite God, instead of walking faithfully with Him as Enoch had.

So if we ask what the scripture defines as “wickedness and evil” this is where the definition starts.

It works the same way in 6:11 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” (Gen 6:13)*

And what is important to notice is that when God surveys the human race and takes stock of what has become of His good creation, and His efforts to restore the Covenant of Creation through the Covenant of Commencement - we come across a shocking revelation...

In chapter 6:6 it 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 tells 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 aren’t going to 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 this Covenant background God’s decision to put an end to all people (Gen 6:13) comes of looking like a capricious deity who is about to do something horrific, and we get people posting nasty memes about it on Facebook.

And I think God not only regretted creating humanity friends is because of how our wickedness misrepresents His just actions of judgment and maligns His character!

But because He had promised in the Covenant of Commencement that one of the Woman’s offspring would crush the head of the Serpent. So if God were to truly wipe out ALL humanity, then keeping this promise would become impossible, God would have gone back on His Word – and He can’t do that. He won’t do that.

So God is in a bit of a dilemma brothers and sisters, and this is something that we see in each stage of covenant redemption. Our actions put God in a dilemma where the Covenant consequences for our unfaithfulness threaten the fulfilment of God’s promises.

So the really interesting parts of scripture, and what provides us with the details for this particular story about Noah, is how God comes up with and puts into effect a solution – which both honors the Covenant obligations and also fulfills His promises.

That’s why we say God will make a way where there seems to be no way!

In this case the solution is to preserve “the seed of the woman” Noah and to re-establish the Covenant with him. That way God does right by the Covenant and keeps His promise.

So God reveals these 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 we are familiar with the details of how God brings this about.

What is of importance for us next is how God establishes – or re-establishes His Covenant with Noah.

So let’s review the definition of a Covenant; 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 judgment and He declares that this will be so.

And we see that this 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 when God says animals may now be eaten and that planting and harvesting will endure – this deals with Life that is sustained by what is available to eat. Further when someone takes a life and brings death God commands they be put to death for the life they have taken. (Gen 8:22, 9:6)

And it is still sovereignly administered. God decides to spare Noah; it’s not Noah asking God to spare him. 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 it is God who determines that this will be an everlasting Covenant.

And as we look at the details of God's Covenant re-establishing with Noah, we can characterize it as a Covenant of Preservation.

Because in it 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 God has completed His judgement He says *"Never again will I curse the ground because of humans, even though every inclination of the human heart is evil from childhood."*

So 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.

And God says to Noah and his family *"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"* (Gen 9:1-3) we hear echoes of the Covenant of Creation, and Commencement...

So, God is preserving both the curses and the blessings of the prior Covenants – how else can you restore them??

And, given how violence had messed things up prior to the flood, God adds the task of dispensing justice as part of our position of being made in His image – in order to preserve human life. God 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, because God wants all of Noah's descendants to understand what has happened between Himself and the human race, He 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 – us.... that God is committed to preserving the world from His regret, and that in spite of our evil towards Him, he is committed to bring about the restoration of His original Covenant 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.

It is to make us 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... even if it kills Him.

You see brothers and sister – we want to know how the Covenants prepare us for Good Friday and Easter and when God make this the sign of Preservation he says “I have set my bow in the clouds (Gen 9:13) as in an archer’s bow that fires an arrow and it is pointing towards heaven – not earth.

This is a foreshadowing that God’s commitment to preserving the earth in spite of human wickedness is going to cost God, that the penalty of death for Covenant unfaithfulness which should be aimed at us – is now aimed at God instead...

This is God’s mercy and grace brothers and sisters.

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

In the same way that we see a difference between cats and dogs whereby a dog says “*you feed me, you play with me, you love me... you must be god!*” A cat says “*you feed me, you play with me, you love me... I must be god!*”

So to 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. So party on!*”

Whereas the offspring of the woman says “*God is withholding judgment and preserving the earth and taking the penalty for it Himself... wow!!! How great is His patience and longsuffering with us, how can we be faithful to Him and participate in His plan....*”

Do you see the difference? Do you see what this reveals in your heart?

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;

“²⁶ 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. ²⁷ 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. ²⁸ ‘For in him we live and move and have our being.’ As some of your own poets have said, ‘We are his offspring.’ ²⁹ “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. ³⁰ In the past God overlooked such ignorance, but now he commands all people everywhere to repent. ³¹ 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.”

Paul was speaking these words to Greek philosophers in the city of Athens, but hearing them in the context of the Covenant of

Preservation gives a whole new depth to what Paul is saying here doesn’t it! And sets the resurrection in the context of Covenant.

Friends, the Covenant of Preservation means that there is still time for people to seek God, to 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.

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, of the way in which we distort the image of God and how we mock God’s patience and longsuffering and preservation.

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 see specifically how God has taken the penalty in Himself and made us faithful Covenant partners through Him.

We must believe this and put our faith and trust in it. So Brothers and sisters let me close now be reminding us that 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 outside of Jesus Christ.

The rainbow does not mean there is no judgment as some today would have us believe...

No the rainbow reminds us that the flood foreshadows a much 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 a fire, which is being preserved for the Day of Judgment - and the 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 endures.

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, that parasitical state of sin which twists what is good in us and 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 learning about the Covenant can 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 be preserved in our hearts and minds...

So that it makes we are ready for what we have yet to learn and what God wants to show us as we prepare for Good Friday and Resurrection Sunday.

Brothers and sisters – may this sign of the Covenant preserve what the Holy Spirit has revealed and spoken to you this morning.
Amen.