



Sunday, August 17, 2025

Genesis 8:18-9:17

If you have been with us for any part of the summer, you would know that we've been walking through the first part of the book of Genesis and over the past few weeks we found ourselves in chapters 6, 7, 8 and 9 where the focus has been on the flood and Noah's ark. Last week was part two where we spent our time looking at the time that was spent on the ark. The text says that the rains fell for a period of 40 days and nights which is interesting because these 40 days of rain weren't just a measure of time, but a biblical pattern of testing and transition.

Moses, Elijah, Israel in the wilderness and even Jesus Himself - all went through seasons marked by 'forty,' where God used difficulty or silence to shape them for what was next. For Noah, the testing came in the storm, but the deeper formation happened in the silence that followed, as he waited for God to act. And just like Noah, we often find that the in-between seasons - the ones where we're waiting without answers - are where God does His deepest work in us.

This week, we step into Genesis 9, where Noah's season of waiting is finally over after half a year. The flood is past, the ground is dry, and God makes a covenant - not just with Noah, but with all creation. And He seals it with one of the most enduring symbols in all of Scripture: the rainbow.

If you have your Bibles, I invite you to turn with me to Genesis 8:18 where we will be reading until 9:17. And if you are able to, I also invite you to stand with me for the reading of the Word of God:

Genesis 8:18-22, 9:1-17

'So Noah went out, and his sons and his wife and his sons' wives with him. 19 Every animal, every creeping thing, every bird, and whatever creeps on the earth, according to their families, went out of the ark.

20 Then Noah built an altar to the Lord, and took of every clean animal and of every clean bird, and offered burnt offerings on the altar. 21 And the Lord smelled a soothing aroma. Then the Lord said in His heart, "I will never again curse the ground for man's sake, although the imagination of man's heart is evil

from his youth; nor will I again destroy every living thing as I have done.

*22 "While the earth remains,
Seedtime and harvest,
Cold and heat,
Winter and summer,
And day and night
Shall not cease."*

9 So God blessed Noah and his sons, and said to them: "Be fruitful and multiply, and fill the earth. 2 And the fear of you and the dread of you shall be on every beast of the earth, on every bird of the air, on all that move on the earth, and on all the fish of the sea. They are given into your hand. 3 Every moving thing that lives shall be food for you. I have given you all things, even as the green herbs. 4 But you shall not eat flesh with its life, that is, its blood. 5 Surely for your lifeblood I will demand a reckoning; from the hand of every beast I will require it, and from the hand of man. From the hand of every man's brother I will require the life of man.

*6 "Whoever sheds man's blood,
By man his blood shall be shed;
For in the image of God
He made man.*

*7 And as for you, be fruitful and multiply;
Bring forth abundantly in the earth
And multiply in it."*

8 Then God spoke to Noah and to his sons with him, saying: 9 "And as for Me, behold, I establish My covenant with you and with your descendants after you, 10 and with every living creature that is with you: the birds, the cattle, and every beast of the earth with you, of all that go out of the ark, every beast of the earth. 11 Thus I establish My covenant with you: Never again shall all flesh be cut off by the waters of the flood; never again shall there be a flood to destroy the earth."

12 And God said: "This is the sign of the covenant which I make between Me and you, and every living creature that is with you, for perpetual generations: 13 I set My rainbow in the cloud, and it shall be for the sign of the covenant between Me and the earth. 14 It shall be, when I bring a cloud over the earth, that the rainbow shall be seen in the cloud; 15 and I will remember My covenant which is between Me and you and every living creature of all flesh; the waters shall never again become a flood to destroy all flesh. 16 The rainbow shall be in the cloud, and I will look on it to remember the everlasting covenant between

God and every living creature of all flesh that is on the earth.” 17 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.”

In our reading today, we see the end of the flood, the restoration of dry land and Noah and his family make their first steps into a brave new world. And I want you to see something here that to me is incredibly important and helps to bring context not only to our reading today about the character and integrity that we see in Noah. Sometimes, when reading the stories of scripture, I often insert myself as one of the characters just as a subconscious way of seeing how I would respond in any of the given situations. In the case of Noah, I did exactly that. And, if it were me that had been on a floating barge for over half a year, surrounded by every animal on the planet - knowing myself - the first thing I'd likely do when I stepped out of that box, would be to run as far away from the smell as I could in any direction.....if I was being dramatic, I'd probably kiss the ground first and then start running....or maybe I'd build a shelter, or explore....go fishing...who knows!! But Noah's first act is different. The very first thing we read is that Noah built an altar and offered a sacrifice to the Lord.

Why? Because to him, this wasn't just escape from the floating barge he had been on for half a year, this was a sacred moment. He knew his rescue wasn't the result of his own perfection - it was the result of God's grace. And even as that grace was being poured out upon him, he recognized his own sinful state by bringing a sacrifice to the Lord. That offering was his way of recognizing his own sin, even in the middle of God's grace and blessing and yet still asking forgiveness. You see, this simple but meaningful act showed a heart of submission and obedience.

And that's what sets Noah apart - not that he was perfect, but that he was humble enough to acknowledge his need before God. The prophet Micah puts it this way:

Micah 6:8

‘What does the Lord require of you but to act justly, to love mercy, and to walk humbly with your God?’

That's exactly what Noah did. His first steps on dry ground weren't about freedom, comfort, or exploration - they were about worship. He placed God at the center of the new creation he was walking into.

But here's what's really interesting to me: this wasn't a spur-of-the-moment decision. Noah didn't step off the ark, look around, and suddenly think, 'Maybe I should make an offering.' No - he had planned this long before the first drop of rain ever fell. If you go back to the instructions in chapter 7, you'll see that he brought extra animals - not just two of each, but seven pairs of every clean

animal designated for sacrifice. In other words, even before the ark was afloat, Noah had already determined in his heart that the very first thing he would do after God's deliverance was to set his heart to worship.

One theologian says it this way:

'Noah, then, had escaped judgment not because he was sinless, not because he was righteous, but because he believed God and received grace or favour in God's sight. He saw the staggering judgment, the extreme anger of God against sinners like nobody since has seen. And thus, he offered to God a sacrifice of repentance, acknowledging that his family was sinful, deserved death and needed a substitute to die in their place.'

And it's right after this altar scene in chapter 8 that we read the opening words of chapter 9: 'So God blessed Noah.'

In just a few minutes we're going to be talking about God's covenant with humanity as seen with the rainbow but before we do, I want to look at the blessing that Noah receives here in chapter 9 as distinct and separate from God's covenant with the rainbow. The reason this is important is because it can be easy to read this and come to the conclusion that because Noah did what was right in God's eyes that God then responded by making a covenant with him and all the people of the world that he would never send a worldwide flood again. No, God's covenant to not flood with world again has nothing to do with Noah's obedience and submission here. But God's blessing does.

Let me explain: What's happening here with Noah's sacrifice and God's blessing is what we refer to as the principle of 'sowing and reaping.' And this is a theme that can be seen all throughout Scripture. It's actually an old farming example that basically says that what you plant is what you will grow. What you put in the ground is exactly what you'll pull out of it. If you sow tomato seeds, you'll reap tomatoes. If you sow cucumber seeds, you're not going to reap tomatoes, but cucumbers of course....you get the idea. Now, when applied spiritually and in context, it means that when we sow seeds of obedience and faithfulness to the Lord, we will always reap His blessing - whatever that may look like.

Like I said earlier, this principle is found woven through all of Scripture. We see it in Abraham's obedience to leave his homeland, which resulted in God making him the father of many nations. Or Solomon's request for wisdom over riches, which led God to give him both. Or the early church in Acts, who gave generously to one another and thus reaped God's provision and growth in remark-

able ways.

Another clear example of this can be seen in the book of Malachi, where God tells His people to bring the whole tithe into the storehouse and, 'see if I will not open the windows of heaven for you and pour down for you a blessing until there is no more need.' That's sowing and reaping - stepping out in obedience and faith, and trusting that God will respond with His provision.

In each of these cases, the blessing of God was connected to the obedience of man. So, Noah sowed in obedience by building the ark on dry land, filling it with the animals and settling in for the long journey ahead and then worshipping God through sacrifice when they found dry land. And as a result he reaped the blessing of God's favour over his life and his family.

But - and this is key - the covenant that God will make with Noah and all of humanity to not flood the world again in verse 12-16 is different. That covenant wasn't a reward or response to Noah's obedience. It wasn't something Noah earned by building the ark or offering a sacrifice. It was God's unilateral promise - completely dependent on His own faithfulness, not Noah's or even humanity's performance.

And although this is the first time we see this kind of unilateral covenant, it's certainly not the last. Later on in Genesis, we see God make a covenant with Abraham - called the Covenant of Pieces - where small sacrificial animals were torn in two and laid on either side of a path. Next, the two people entering the covenant would walk down between the halves of animals together as if to say:

'May this be done to us if we do not keep our oath.'

Which was their way of keeping each other accountable to the oath that they were promising each other.

However, in Genesis 15, when God entered this covenant with Abraham, He caused Abraham to fall asleep, and God passed through the sacrificial animals, alone. This act signified that the covenant rested entirely on God's faithfulness - not on Abraham's ability to keep it. God was saying, in essence, 'If I fail to keep my promise, may I be like these animals.' But God never fails, and the entire covenant depended on His unfailing faithfulness.

And all of this serves to point us to the greatest unilateral covenant of all time - salvation - where Jesus Christ is placed upon the cross and dies for our sins - thus paying the price that we could not -

- thus providing a way for us live and not die. Not because of anything we could have done to earn it, but simply because of His great love for us.

John 3:16

'For God SO LOVED the world that He gave His only begotten Son, that whoever believes in Him should not perish but have everlasting life.'

And so we can see that the covenant that God is making with Noah is yet God's way of foreshadowing what would ultimately come through His son Jesus, on the cross.

We don't deserve it. Our sin is great. We could not earn it, but because of His great love for us - He freely gives it.

And that right there is why the rainbow is such an integral part of the story. It's a picture of grace that isn't controlled or manipulated by our behaviour - it's a promise rooted not in what we do for God, but in what He has chosen to do for us - because of His great love for you and for me.

So why a rainbow then? What is it about a rainbow that God chose to set it apart as a sign of His covenant?

So the first thing I would say to this is that there are generally two schools of thought when it comes to the existence of the rainbow. The first school says that this is the first time the world has ever seen a rainbow and that the world pre-flood and post flood changed dramatically so the sign would have stood out accordingly. And then the second school says that the laws of science and physics have been around since the beginning and the rainbow has always been, but this is the first time that God is now attributing a covenant sign to the rainbow.

Now wherever you land on that part, shouldn't change its significance.

Let's take a few moments to look at the specifics behind rainbows and see if we can draw a connection.

ROYGBIV. Every single colour is held in that exact and specific sequence. Those seven colours encompass the fullness of all colour. There is no colour on the face of planet earth that is not contained within the rainbow. It is complete. And so are the promises of God. They are correctly and specifically ordered and they are not lacking in any way, shape or form. They are completely, com-

plete.

Did you know that rainbows are not in fact an arc but fully circular? (Show pic). We just can't see the bottom half because of our position. I may be reaching here, but I think there's something significant in this fact alone. The fact that all rainbows are fully circular speaks to the idea of the fullness and completion that is the very nature of God - as we just saw with the full array of colour. Our position in only being able to see part of it speaks to elements of trust and faith even though only partial understanding may be given. The part we can see however, is enough to trust Him for the part we can't see. So ultimately, we can trust His promises even though we may not be able to see the full picture.

Thirdly - in Hebrew, the word for rainbow here is 'qešet,' which is the same word used for a warrior's bow. In Genesis 9, we see the metaphor of God essentially hanging His bow in the sky - a public sign of disarmament. In the ancient world, when a warrior hung up his bow, it meant the conflict was over. And notice the bow's position: the arc points upward toward heaven, not down toward earth - as if to say, 'If this covenant is broken, the arrow is aimed at Me.' That's the same heart we see later in God's covenant with Abraham, where He alone passes through the pieces. God holds Himself accountable. And ultimately, it points us forward to the cross, where Jesus takes the arrow of judgment into Himself so that we can be spared. The God of the universe doesn't need to do this - but His love is so great that He swears by Himself, on Himself, for us.

So, after hearing this and understanding this at a bit of a deeper level, to me, it's no wonder that the enemy would want to distort this image anyway that he possibly could. And it's not just in our generation. Every generation since the first rainbow stretched across the sky has been trying to manipulate the rainbow for its own purposes.

In the ancient world, pagan myths attached the rainbow to false gods and goddesses - like Iris in Greek mythology, who was said to carry messages between heaven and earth, or the serpent-rainbow figures in Aboriginal and African lore that turned the bow of peace into something to be feared. In European superstition, people believed the rainbow could bring curses if you pointed at it, or even change a man into a woman if he walked under it. More 'innocent' legends arose too, like leprechauns hiding pots of gold at the rainbow's end, turning God's covenant sign into a chase for earthly treasure. Or even good ole Kermit the Frog, who sang about a 'rainbow connection' where dreams come true for "the lovers, the dreamers, and me." Sounds harmless, even sweet - but it's another example of how the rainbow has been stretched, bent, and marketed until the covenant sign that God gave the world has become everything but God's covenant sign.

But here's the truth: no matter how much humanity tries to manipulate it, the rainbow belongs to

God. It is His bow, His covenant, His promise. Every time it arcs across the sky, it still declares the same message today as it did in Noah's day: God's mercy is available to all who will simply turn to Him.

The rainbow reminds us that God restrains His judgment - not because the world deserves it, but because His covenant love holds Him to it. It even says in verse 15 and 16 that no matter how bad the world gets the rainbow is a reminder not just to us, but also to God, Himself that He will not unleash mass judgment by flooding the earth again. So instead of pouring out His wrath which is rightly positioned towards sinful humanity, in His great love and mercy God chose to pour out that wrath and judgement upon His Son, Jesus in our place. Think about that. The wrath and judgement that was rightfully meant for us, God placed on His Son, Jesus instead, so that we could have a chance to turn back to Him and receive mercy and grace instead of the judgement that we deserve. Friends, this is the beauty of the rainbow.

And you know what's amazing? That same God is still writing His story of grace and mercy today - not just in Scripture, not just in history past, but right here, right now, in the lives of people, even in the youngest among us. This past summer, many of our kids and kids from the community got to experience that at summer camp. They laughed, learned, worshipped, and discovered more about God's love for them. So before we close, we want to celebrate what God has been doing in their lives by sharing a little recap with you.

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