

## **The Rainbow**

Genesis 9:8-17

Few things, if any, are as beautiful as a rainbow. And who of us could deny the enjoyment of seeing a glorious rainbow in the sky after a rainstorm. I still remember the occasion some years ago seeing a full and complete double rainbow. Absolutely beautiful.

You likely would know the scientific explanation of a rainbow. In scientific terms you know how white light is refracted through particles of water, creating a spectrum of colors. I had always memorized that spectrum by the initials, ROY G BIV. Red, orange, yellow, green, blue, indigo, violet. Studying the refraction of light was always one of the most enjoyable parts of physics for me.

And I always look for rainbows in the sky. But Genesis 9 is not about physics. The point is not a scientific explanation about the refraction of light, as interesting as that study would be. Rather, the point of Genesis 9 is God's use of the rainbow as a sign of his covenant.

God is establishing a covenant with Noah. Now remember, a covenant is a contract, a bond or agreement. In the case of the covenant God establishes with his people, God is the one who sovereignly determines all the stipulations of the covenant. And God is the one who determined that the penalty for breaking the covenant, the curse of the covenant, was death. And so a covenant is a bond in blood. Sovereignly administered by God.

We can talk of God's covenant with Adam and Eve before the fall, called in our Confession of Faith, the Covenant of Works. That was the relationship between God and Adam and Eve while

man was still without sin. The covenant was simple. If man continued in obedience, he would live. If he disobeyed, he would die. That was it—no provision for redemption. Just death.

As we know, Adam and Eve did disobey, and they surely died. But then, even as God pronounces his curse upon them, and upon Satan, God defines the terms of the second covenant, which our Confession calls the Covenant of Grace. It was a covenant to redemption, a contract by which God agreed to send his son Jesus to die for the sins of those who had broken the first covenant. The promise of that covenant comes first in the curse upon Satan, found in,

Gen. 3:5 "And I will put enmity Between you and the woman, And between your seed and her Seed; He shall bruise your head, And you shall bruise His heel."

That covenant of grace continues today, reinforced and reestablished by a series of covenant through the OT and finally revealed as the New Covenant in Jesus Christ. What we have here in Genesis 9 is the first of several such covenant renewals. It's all the same covenant of grace, but each successive renewal builds upon the previous ones and adds to our understanding of the one covenant. And so we see the covenant reestablished with Abraham, Moses, David, and then Jesus. But before then, the first covenant renewal, is through Noah.

### **I. GOD REESTABLISHES HIS COVENANT OF GRACE THROUGH NOAH.**

Actually, the Hebrew word for covenant, berith, is first used with reference to Noah. We see the promise of that covenant in,

Gen. 6:8 "But I will establish My covenant with you; and you shall go into the ark—you, your sons, your wife, and your sons' wives with you."

That promise, made before the flood actually started, was fulfilled by the provisions we read about in Genesis 9.

v.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.”

We learn a lot about the nature of the covenant of grace in these verses. First, we see that,

**A. Through Noah, God’s covenant is established with succeeding generations.**

In other words, the covenant was established with Moses and with his descendants.

v.9

This is a really important doctrine in what we sometimes call covenant theology. God enters into a contract with his people, and the provisions of that contract are automatically applied to succeeding generations.

Let me say that more specifically, using the words of the Apostle Peter, answering that provoking question by the crowds on the day of Pentecost, “Brothers, what shall we do?”

Acts 2:38 Then Peter said to them, “Repent, and let every one of you be baptized in the name of Jesus Christ for the remission of sins; and you shall receive the gift of the Holy Spirit. 39 For the promise is to you and to your children, and to all who are afar off, as many as the Lord our God will call.”

What promise? The promise of the covenant, the promise of salvation. The promise of forgiveness of sins. And the promise of the Holy Spirit. The promise is for you, and for your children, and for all who are far off, meaning all the generations who are far off!

God’s covenant promise of salvation which is given to us is also given to our children, grandchildren, great-grandchildren, and to a thousandth generation! That’s why we place upon our children the sign of the covenant, namely baptism. Not that baptism automatically saves a child or guarantees a place in heaven, but that it represents the truth that God’s promise is for you and for your children! With no end in sight!

v.12

“Perpetual generations” means “everlasting generations.” Generations to come, beyond number. That description is repeated in,

v.16

The covenant which God establishes with his people is permanent, it continues to everlasting generations. We’ll see this important idea again. With Abraham.

Gen. 12:7 Then the LORD appeared to Abram and said, “To your descendants I will give this land.”

Gen. 15:17 “And it came to pass, when the sun went down and it was dark, that behold, there appeared a smoking oven and a burning torch that passed between those pieces. 18 On the same day the LORD made a covenant with Abram, saying: “To your descendants I have given this land, from the river of Egypt to the great river, the River Euphrates.”

And with Moses,

Deut. 29:9 Therefore keep the words of this covenant, and do them, that you may prosper in all that you do. 10 “All of you stand today before the LORD your God: your leaders and your tribes and your elders and your officers, all the men of Israel, 11 your little ones and your wives—also the stranger who is in your camp,

from the one who cuts your wood to the one who draws your water— 12 that you may enter into covenant with the LORD your God, and into His oath, which the LORD your God makes with you today, 13 that He may establish you today as a people for Himself, and that He may be God to you, just as He has spoken to you, and just as He has sworn to your fathers, to Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob. 14 “I make this covenant and this oath, not with you alone, 15 but with him who stands here with us today before the LORD our God, as well as with him who is not here with us today.”

In the context, we can determine that “those who are not here today” are those not yet born! Those who would belong to succeeding generations. Through their ancestors, they were entering a covenant with God. God establishes his covenant with families, with generations of families.

That is so practical with respect to our own experiences as families. Some of you have children, some grandchildren and even great grandchild. Some of you don’t have children yet but would like to some day. Whatever the case might be, consider your descendants who are not yet here today. You can even pray for them, your children, even if you have none yet. Grandchildren. Great-grandchildren, for generations to come, to the 3rd and 4th generation, unto the 10th generation.

God has made a covenant with his people, and therefore he has includes in that covenant our children. And that covenant extends to our grandchildren, children not yet here today. It extends to our great-grandchildren. Through Noah, God’s covenant is established with succeeding generations, perpetual generations. God’s covenant is permanent.

Something else is obvious through this covenant with Noah,

not made evident in any other of the covenants.

## **B. Through Noah, God’s covenant is established with all living creatures.**

In this sense, it is a universal covenant. The provisions of the covenant deal with all of God’s creation, not merely mankind.

Look at,  
v.9-10

God couldn’t have been any clearer. Included in this covenant were all living creatures, literally all living souls. Every animal which has the breath of life, birds, livestock, and all the wild animals. In fact, all the animals that came out of the ark with you.

God’s covenant affects all the animals, every living soul on earth. What that means is that ultimately, every living creature, indeed the whole universe, will be delivered from God’s curse pronounced as a consequence of man’s sin. The whole world shall be redeemed, and God shall bring about the new heavens and new earth, a renewed creation corresponding to the original creation before the fall so perfectly described in the Garden of Eden.

The necessity for all creation to be redeemed is obvious, because all creation suffers the effects of man’s fall. All creation is subjected to frustration. All creation is marred by man’s sin and cursed by God’s judgment. Never is that frustration of all creation made clearer than in Romans 8:19-22, a passage which also speaks about all creation being redeemed. I don’t mean by that that animals are saved from sin, for animals are not created in God’s image and therefore don’t sin. They are not moral, but instinctive. But animals are saved from the condemnation of man’s sin, namely death!

Rom. 8:19 “For the earnest expectation of the creation

eagerly waits for the revealing of the sons of God. 20 For the creation was subjected to futility, not willingly, but because of Him who subjected it in hope; 21 because the creation itself also will be delivered from the bondage of corruption into the glorious liberty of the children of God. 22 For we know that the whole creation groans and labors with birth pangs together until now.”

God’s covenant reestablished with Noah proves that all creatures, all creation, will be liberated from its bondage to decay. All creatures will be brought into the glorious freedom of the children of God, that is, the freedom of life! Not only man, but the entire universe shall experience ultimate deliverance from the curse.

Let me give you a glimpse of that ultimate deliverance to be enjoyed by all creation, in the prophecy of Isaiah,

Isa. 11:6 “The wolf also shall dwell with the lamb, The leopard shall lie down with the young goat, The calf and the young lion and the fatling together; And a little child shall lead them. 7 The cow and the bear shall graze; Their young ones shall lie down together; And the lion shall eat straw like the ox. 8 The nursing child shall play by the cobra’s hole, And the weaned child shall put his hand in the viper’s den. 9 They shall not hurt nor destroy in all My holy mountain, For the earth shall be full of the knowledge of the LORD As the waters cover the sea.”

So there will be no death! That’s what all creation is longing for, “groaning as in the pains of childbirth right up to the present time.” There is an inseparable connection among all God’s creation, and a connection between the redemption of mankind and the redemption of all the animals. In fact, the promise of salvation for all God’s people is given in terms of this universal covenant with Noah. Speaking about the restoration of Israel, which actually refers to the NT church of God’s elect people from

every nation, God says through the prophet Hosea,

Hosea 2:14 “Therefore, behold, I will allure her, Will bring her into the wilderness, And speak comfort to her. 15 I will give her her vineyards from there, And the Valley of Achor as a door of hope; She shall sing there, As in the days of her youth, As in the day when she came up from the land of Egypt. 16 “And it shall be, in that day,” Says the LORD, “That you will call Me ‘My Husband,’ And no longer call Me ‘My Master,’ 17 For I will take from her mouth the names of the Baals, And they shall be remembered by their name no more. 18 In that day I will make a covenant for them With the beasts of the field, With the birds of the air, And with the creeping things of the ground. Bow and sword of battle I will shatter from the earth, To make them lie down safely.”

There again, the focus of God’s covenant of grace is not only with mankind, but with all creation. And the reason for that is simple--all creation was affected by the curse God pronounced as a consequence of man’s sin. And then, as God reestablishes his covenant of grace through Noah, we see his promise of preservation. This is what the whole covenant with Noah is about, and we’ve seen it before. To review,

### **C. Through Noah, God’s covenant guarantees the preservation of all the earth.**

God states the promise of the covenant clearly.

v.11

Never again would a universal flood come. That was even more fully stated in,

Gen. 8:20 "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."

This idea of preservation, of course, refers back to our subject last week, for the preservation of man is the highest objective, for man is created in God's image. And as we studied, man's life was sacred, and was not to be ended by murder upon the threat of divine retribution.

v.5-6

And the accompanying promise of preservation is plain,

v.7

Then we come to see the rainbow, God's token of his faithfulness to keep his promise of preservation. And in giving that sign,

## **II. GOD REINFORCES THE CERTAINTY OF HIS COVENANT OF GRACE THROUGH THE RAINBOW.**

The earth will be preserved. All creation, and particularly man's life, will be protected. God will see to it. And he proves it by giving a sign, which is the rainbow.

v.17

v.12-13

Literally, it just says "bow." God will set his bow in the clouds. Now think about a bow. What is a bow? It is an instrument of warfare, an instrument of battle. It is an instrument of judgment. But it is used by God here as a symbol of preservation.

### **A. With the sign of the covenant, the symbol of judgment is replaced by a symbol of preservation.**

The bow, the battle bow, will no longer be in God's hand, for he will never again bring a universal judgment, not as long as the earth remains. There will be a final judgment, but until then, God's longsuffering and God's magnificent grace will be abundantly revealed. And that bow becomes a rainbow, which in this context is an obvious symbol of preservation, for it is the symbol of this covenant of preservation.

v.13

But how, exactly, is the rainbow a symbol of preservation? Think back to the conditions of the world before the flood. There was this great water vapor canopy over all the earth, literally above the expanse or the sky. God separated the waters below the expanse from the waters above the expanse. And the expanse was the sky, or more scientifically, the atmosphere. Before the flood, the waters were not IN the atmosphere, they were above it. Separated from it.

And since the water above the sky allowed light to pass through, it would have been invisible, thus water vapor. Thus there would have been no droplets of water in the sky before the flood, and, as we know, no rain. Therefore, there could have been no rainbow.

But in the flood, the water vapor canopy above the sky was broken, pouring out all its unmeasurable volumes of water upon the earth. So after the flood, the skies would now contain clouds, those clouds would contain water, and the sun reflecting through would create a rainbow. Thus, no judgment similar to the flood is possible any longer, because once that volume of water above the sky broke through the atmosphere and fell to earth, it would not be put back above the sky. The ordinary clouds, filled with water which falls to the earth as rain, couldn't possibly produce the levels of flooding we read about in Genesis 8.

So from a scientific perspective, the rainbow demonstrates that there is water in the clouds, and proves that another universal flood is impossible, symbolizing God's own promise.

But how else is the rainbow a symbol of preservation? I could speculate with lots of symbolism and allegory, but I'll refrain from doing that. I will mention, however, an obvious point. The beauty of the rainbow, full of color and order, compared to the gloom and dread pictured by the great rain clouds. Rain clouds are ominous. They are black. They instill terror and fear. And with the power of rain and storms, they should.

But as a backdrop to that picture of terrifying clouds, there is this picture of beauty. The rainbow. And to quote Dr. Palmer Robertson, who more than any other man has shaped my understanding of the covenants, "In the context of threatening judgment symbolized by the bloated rain-clouds, God designates the overarching beauty of the rainbow to depict his grace-in-judgment. Having once destroyed the world, thereby depicting the immutability of his righteous decrees, the Lord God now couples the clouds with his rainbow to manifest his free and unmerited purpose of grace."

Surely, the rainbow is an appropriate symbol of God's own beauty and glory. In fact, in other verses we see the rainbow used as just such a symbol,

Ezek. 1:26 "And above the firmament over their heads was the likeness of a throne, in appearance like a sapphire stone; on the likeness of the throne was a likeness with the appearance of a man high above it. 27 Also from the appearance of His waist and upward I saw, as it were, the color of amber with the appearance of fire all around within it; and from the appearance of His waist and downward I saw, as it were, the appearance of fire with brightness all around. 28 Like the appearance of a rainbow in a

cloud on a rainy day, so was the appearance of the brightness all around it. This was the appearance of the likeness of the glory of the LORD."

And also,

Rev. 4:2 "Immediately I was in the Spirit; and behold, a throne set in heaven, and One sat on the throne. 3 And He who sat there was like a jasper and a sardius stone in appearance; and there was a rainbow around the throne, in appearance like an emerald."

God will preserve his creation forever, unto the end of the age. Nuclear war will not bring annihilation to this world. Global warming will not end this age. Chemical or biological weapons will not bring universal destruction. Flooding, earthquakes, volcanoes or other natural disasters will not bring an end to God's creation or to man's existence. For God will remember his covenant. In fact, what we read here is that,

**B. With the sign of the covenant, God gives assurance that he will remember his covenant forever.**

v.14-17

There is a lot of repetition in those verses, causes those of a liberal mindset to conclude that Genesis is just the edited collection of a variety of different sources of writings, not the infallible writing of Moses given by the inspiration of God. But we don't need to agree with that conclusion, for Hebrew writers repeated things just to make their point. Repetition was emphasis. Moses was a Hebrew, writing as a Hebrew, and so when he wanted to emphasize something, he just said it twice. Or more.

The repeated words are the words, "I will remember my covenant."

v.15a

v.16a

Now, as I mentioned a few weeks ago, when the Scripture said that God remembered Noah, this doesn't mean that God actually forgot! Remembering, for God, means that he will act on behalf of his people. It reinforces his promise to keep his covenant. It is a constant reminder of a commitment he has made, a constant reminder of the faithfulness to which he has pledged himself.

The rainbow is not only a symbol for us, a symbol of encouragement reminding us of God's covenant promise, but the rainbow actually reminds God of his covenant promise. So every time that you see a rainbow, you can be assured that God has promised to protect and preserve his creation. And you can be assured, that in his protection, he will bring every one of his elect people unto salvation.

Signs are wonderful things. The rainbow is a universal sign. And we have another sign before us this afternoon. Another sign of God's covenant. This sign is given to his church. It's a sign of the blood of the covenant that was shed for the forgiveness of our sins, the blood of the new covenant, the blood of Jesus Christ.

With the rainbow, God promises us protection from his judgment. With the Lord's Supper, God shows us the price that was paid to secure that protection. It was the sacrifice of blood, the sacrifice of a life. An innocent life. The life of Jesus, whose body and blood is before us this afternoon..

And so, as you partake of these elements, and as you look for the rainbow the next time it rains, be reminded, be assured and

be convinced, that,

Hebr. 9:11 "But Christ came as High Priest of the good things to come, with the greater and more perfect tabernacle not made with hands, that is, not of this creation. 12 Not with the blood of goats and calves, but with His own blood He entered the Most Holy Place once for all, having obtained eternal redemption. 13 For if the blood of bulls and goats and the ashes of a heifer, sprinkling the unclean, sanctifies for the purifying of the flesh, 14 how much more shall the blood of Christ, who through the eternal Spirit offered Himself without spot to God, cleanse your conscience from dead works to serve the living God? 15 And for this reason He is the Mediator of the new covenant, by means of death, for the redemption of the transgressions under the first covenant, that those who are called may receive the promise of the eternal inheritance."