

Noah, part 2: God's promise and God's law. (Genesis 8:13-9:13)



We left off two weeks ago with Noah and family surrounded by laughing crowds while he built a huge boat (the ark) and preached that the end was near. As Paul Harvey would say, you know the rest of that story. As promised, the floods did come and except for those eight people kept safe within the ark, every other living human perished as "*the fountains of the great deep burst forth*" ... *and the rain fell for forty days and forty nights* (7:11). What most people don't know is that those deep floodwaters remained covering the earth for more than 7 months after which the ark finally came to rest near the top of Mt. Ararat. But it still took another 3 months for the waters completely recede and the land to dry sufficiently for Noah and family to come out. One year and ten days after they entered the ark, Noah and family and all the animals came forth to a completely different world.

Then, as He had done earlier with Adam and Eve, God gave a very similar blessing and charge to Noah and family.

'Be fruitful and multiply, and fill the earth.
The fear and dread of you shall rest on every animal ...
Every moving thing that lives shall be food for you;
Gen 9:1-3

Through these eight people, God had given humanity a chance to start over. Life for Noah's family and all their descendants would also be much easier and much safer than life was before the flood.

1. because after the flood, God lifted most of the curse from the ground so that growing food would no longer be as burdensome of a task (8:21, cf. Romans 8:18-23).
2. because humans were now given the right to hunt and defend themselves against wild animals. Adam and Eve were only given for food green plants and, we assume, the domestic animals that they had raised. Now Noah and family could harvest wild game as well. And the animals for this reason would learn to fear humans thus making daily life in the fields a bit safer.

But God gave Noah and family more than just some relief from the planetary curse and an expanded dinner menu, He also for the very first time gave humanity specific laws to follow. Laws that would help protect human life from other evil people such as Cain's grandson Lamech who, fearing no retaliation, even bragged about taking another's life. After the flood, this would also change.

Jewish Rabbis have extrapolated from various portions of the book of Genesis that God actually gave A&E not just one but perhaps four or five basic codes to live by.

Not to worship idols.
Not to curse God.
Not to commit sexual immorality.
Not to steal.
Not to commit murder

For example, A&E's act of eating from the tree of the Knowledge of good and evil, since it had been forbidden to them, was essentially a theft. But now, since God had observed throughout the bloody history of pre-flood humanity that "*the inclination of the human heart is evil from youth,*" He gave Noah two more very specific laws.

To establish courts of justice that could deliver capital punishment as a legal response to murder.

And not to be cruel to animals

The "**courts of justice**" idea comes from God's dictate that there should be "**a reckoning for human life.**" Humans were not to live by the law of revenge – "*you killed my cow, so I will now kill two of yours*" – but by an orderly system for the responsible remediation for sin; punishing only the guilty party and in an appropriate manner. Humans were now charged with setting up courts of law and living under both their restraints and protection.

The law against **cruelty to animals** comes from God's command "*not to eat flesh with its life – that is its blood intact.*" Basically this command came to be understood that all animals should be raised, dispatched, and processed as humanely as possible.

So now you have learned something new, which is that countless years later when Moses brought the Ten Commandments down from Mt. Sinai, at least five of them were already part of what came to be known as the Seven Laws of Noah which Jewish Rabbis taught were binding for all people for all time. Laws which the Apostle Paul would later comment that God had actually programmed into every human heart.

But let's take a few moments to examine this idea of what has come to known as **capital punishment** or the death penalty. In response to the horrendous sins of pre-flood humanity God told Noah that henceforth whoever kills a human (whether it be an animal or another human) should be answered with an equal retribution: a life for a life.

Whoever sheds the blood of a human,
by a human shall that person's blood be shed;
for in his own image God made humankind.

Genesis 9:6

Thus, up until the last 50 years the legitimacy of capital punishment has never been questioned. But recently modern society has begun to do so.

1. Because of all the inequities in our modern judicial system, we cannot guarantee 100% of the time that the right person has been convicted for the crime.
2. Because Modern moralists say that the death penalty is just a barbaric remnant of the past and that human Life is so precious that even a murderer should be allowed to live.

I certainly agree fully with the first point of carefully checking and eliminating wrongful convictions, because our court systems have at times for various reasons proved very imperfect. As demonstrated by the State of Illinois where in the 25 years from 1986 until 2011 before that State completely abolished the death penalty, Of the 298 men and women sentenced to death, 20 were later exonerated (that is 6.7% of all guilty verdicts proven false).

But now, with multiple levels of mandated appeals that must be exhausted and with powerful criminal defense groups and DNA testing freeing wrongfully convicted felons, **Should not those who have been found guilty beyond any shadow of doubt of premeditated murder receive justice in kind for the murder they have committed; their life for the life they took?**

To answer this question, let's take a moment to look at this idea that Life is so precious, even a murderer should be allowed to live. The Bible's response is that life is so precious that anyone who dares to steal another's life should also forfeit their own. The reason given is not because of some barbaric need for retaliation but that since all humans are made in the image of God, to take another's life is so heinous a crime that it demands your own be forfeit as well.

Modern moralists would say that to take another life in response for a life taken cheapens the idea of life. The Bible says just the opposite, that life is so precious to then let live one who has taken another's life is what actually cheapens life; without equal retribution justly determined and delivered, human life is devalued. And when you think about it, does not life in prison without hope of parole actually seem more of a revengeful response and horrible fate than a quick painless death? This is certainly something to think about.

Now that you know capital punishment was one of the very first God-given laws to actually protect human life, how does that effect your thinking in this modern debate.



But let's now return to Noah and family as they first departed the ark. Can you imagine the devastation they looked out upon? It was an empty, mud covered wasteland. Maybe a few wisps of grass were beginning to break through

the silty crust; maybe a few hardy trees that survived the year underwater were beginning to bud out. And like the aftermath of tsunami, was there also a lot of debris along with human or animal remains strewn about or had the settling mud mercifully buried all these reminders? AS far as I can tell, no painter has ever tried to honestly depict the reality of destruction and desolation that Noah's family saw spreading out before them. I am sure that it was both with a deep level of fear and dismay as well as gratitude that Noah built an alter in order to offer thanksgiving to God.

Sure God had saved them and once again blessed them, but how could they ever hope to ever restore what had now been lost in this tragically empty landscape. And so God promised them that the regular seasonal cycles that they had been used to would come and never again be disrupted.

As long as the earth endures,
seedtime and harvest, cold and heat,
summer and winter, day and night,
shall not cease.'
Genesis 8:22

Thus God's promise to never again bring a flood upon the earth was just as important for Noah to hear as it is for the rest of us to read and understand.



So God gave Noah the rainbow as a continual reminder of His promise given. I am sure that thereafter whenever a fearsome storm came over them, the descendants of Noah would quickly look for the rainbow as an assurance and reminder that God keeps his promises.

Countless of thousands of years later, the Apostle Peter would write that "***in the last days scoffers will come,***" both questioning whether such a great flood had ever happened or if God would ever keep His promise of a second return in judgment upon the whole earth. Their claim would be that life had always progressed in an orderly fashion from the very beginning until now. Which surprisingly is exactly what the first proponents of evolutionary theory used to claim until scientists discovered from the fossil record that throughout its geologic history, our planet earth has already seen five mass extinction events where life was almost completely wiped off the face of the planet. They now warn that we humans may be causing the sixth such event.

Peter's comment about these future scoffers was that they would deliberately ignore the evidence and historic testimony that God had once destroyed everything by water. But because of God's promise, according to Peter, the next time our planet sees such divine judgment, it will be by fire.

Here is one last thought before we close today's lesson. God called His rainbow promise a "**covenant**" between Himself and not only humans but all living creatures. Now a covenant is an interesting legal term. Unlike contracts that can be signed, sealed, and then legally broken, a covenant requires that each party continue keeping their promise no matter what the other party does; the only thing even close to such an unbreakable promise in our modern world would be, the Christian vows of marriage, "*until death do us part*," which I remind you also finds its source all the way back to A&E and the very first commandment given in the Bible.

But in this case there was no second party to this covenant. God Himself was unilaterally promising to never again destroy the earth by a flood; which for better or worse is why the next ending of our world will be by fire (2 Peter 3:3-9).

So today we as once again come to the communion table to be reminded that God has always kept His promises all the way back to the very first one He gave to Eve that one day one of her descendants would crush that ancient serpent, the devil, under foot and restore humanity back to its close relationship with God our maker.

We now know what Eve could never have imagined, that in the fullness of time, according to God's timetable, that promised person would be God's own son, Christ Jesus, sent to earth to seek us and to save us by giving his life in ransom for ours.

When will Jesus, as promised, come again?
This next time as Ruler and Judge over all the earth?

That is a future date which only God the Father knows. But we do know this: that God keeps His promises. So, today, if you have not already met Christ as your savior, one day you will meet Him as your judge; and that is nothing to scoff at.

Let's pray together about this.