

Genesis 9:1-17 "The One Who Keeps His Promises"*

Proposition: In Genesis 9:1-17, God revealed two things that teach us what He's like and how He operates.

I. God revealed His commands (1-7).

A. Life is to be promoted (1-3).

1. In the post-Flood world, some things remained the same (1).

2. In the post-Flood world, some things changed (2-3).

B. Life is to be protected (4-7).

1. Don't eat blood (4).

2. Don't shed blood (5).

3. Violators are held accountable (6).

II. God revealed His covenant (8-17).

A. Here are the stipulations (8-11).

1. It's universal (8-10).

2. It's unchanging (11).

B. Here is the sign (12-17).

1. The rainbow reminds God.

2. The rainbow reminds us.

Implications: What do we learn about God from this?

1. God makes promises.

2. God wants us to know His promises.

3. God keeps His promises.

4. God wants us to live in light of His promises.

Booker T. Washington describes meeting an ex-slave from Virginia in his book *Up From Slavery*: "I found that this man had made a contract with his master, two or three years previous to the Emancipation Proclamation, to the effect that the slave was to be permitted to buy himself, by paying so much per year for his body; and while he was paying for himself, he was to be permitted to labour where and for whom he pleased. "Finding that he could secure better wages in Ohio, he went there. When freedom came, he was still in debt to his master some three hundred dollars. Notwithstanding that the Emancipation Proclamation freed him from any obligation to his master, this black man walked the greater portion of the distance back to where his old master lived in Virginia, and placed the last dollar, with interest, in his hands. In talking to me about this, the man told me that he knew that he did not have to pay his debt, but that he had given his word to his master, and his word he had never broken. He felt that he could not enjoy his freedom till he had fulfilled his promise."

Promises. We make them all the time. And others make them to us. Yet sadly, far too often those promises are broken.

It's hard to know who you can trust these days, isn't it? A person's word seems to mean so little. Two people stand at the altar and proclaim to God and each other, "I promise to have and to hold from this day forth, till death do us part." But the statistics tell us that half of those promises will be broken.

Husbands break promises to wives. Wives break promises to husbands. Parents break promises to children. Politicians make promises to constituents and break them. Bosses make promises to employees and don't follow through.

Granted, I'm speaking in generalizations. Not everyone breaks their promises, that's true. But many do. *Many* do. And you may be wondering, "Is there anyone you can trust these days?"

I'm so glad to be able to tell you, yes, there is. There is a Person who always keeps His promises. He is the Lord God. Several thousand years ago the Lord made a promise that we're going to investigate this morning. You'll find it in Genesis 9.

God gave this particular promise at a critical time. He'd just destroyed the world by an earthwide Flood. The sole survivors were Noah, his family, and the animals that Noah took with him on the ark. They rode the ark for a little over a year and then left their safe haven.

Imagine what must have gone through Noah's mind as he scanned the horizon of the world God had just destroyed. His house was gone. His hometown was gone. His neighbors were gone. All the inhabitants of the world were gone except for him, his family, and the animal remnant. Sin had taken its toll.

I can imagine that a question that crossed Noah's mind was this. *How long until it happens again?* He, too, was a sinner. So were his children. Wouldn't it merely be a matter of time before the world would fill up with evil again? Then what, another Flood?

At that point the One who keeps His promises spoke. What did He say? We'll find out this morning. In Genesis 9:1-17, God revealed two things to Noah, both of which teach us that there is One who keeps His promises.

I. God revealed His commands (1-7).

Verse 1 begins, "Then God blessed Noah and his sons." Remember what just happened. As we saw last time, the Flood is over. Noah got off the ark and offered a blood sacrifice to the Lord. God was pleased and responded with this promise to Noah (8:21), "Never again will I curse the ground because of man...And never again will I destroy all living creatures as I have done."

God gave His Word, a promise. And then He blessed Noah and his sons. How? It might surprise us, but His blessing came in the form of *commands*. We tend to think that the "blessed" life is the command-free life. Not so. The blessed life is the life lived in submission to the will of the Giver of life. The blessed life is not doing your *own* thing; it's doing *God's* thing.

Specifically, God gave Noah and his sons commands pertaining to *life*. What does God think about life? Is God pro-life? Here God specified two responsibilities that have to do with life.

A. Life is to be promoted (1-3). Hear His instructions, "Then God blessed Noah and his sons, saying to them, 'Be fruitful and increase in number and fill the earth. 2 The fear and dread of you will fall upon all the beasts of the earth and all the birds of the air, upon every creature that moves along the ground, and upon all the fish of the sea; they are given into your hands. 3 Everything that lives and moves will be food for you. Just as I gave you the green plants, I now give you everything.'"

Do those words sound familiar? They're basically the same ones God gave to Adam and Eve in Genesis

1:28, "God blessed them and said to them, 'Be fruitful and increase in number; fill the earth and subdue it.'"

It's a new beginning, a new world. And the Living God wants His world to be full of living things. Remember that when you hear the rhetoric about over-population.

Notice God gave this command to Noah *and* his sons. God told Adam and Eve to populate the earth. God told Noah and his sons the same. In addition, God told Adam and Eve to *subdue* the earth. Did God tell Noah and his sons to do that? Not here. Rather in verse 2 we learn that something has changed. Realize this...

1. *In the post-Flood world, some things remained the same (1).* Such as the command to be fruitful and fill the earth. But conversely...

2. *In the post-Flood world, some things changed (2-3).* Like what? God initiated two key changes that He mentions here.

The first is in verse 2. What was true of the relationship between Adam and the animals? Adam named the animals. Adam lived in total harmony with the animal kingdom. But that changed with Noah.

In the post-Flood world, the animals now experience "fear and dread" of man. So do the birds, and so do the fish.

We have a hummingbird feeder on our front porch. What a fascinating creature! And what a flighty creature! As soon as a human being approaches the porch, those tiny birds take off like a bolt. Where did they get that fear? In Genesis 9.

Is man still God's vice-regent in the world? Is man still supposed to exercise dominion over the rest of creation? Yes, but no longer will creation cooperate as readily as it did with Adam. Now the man-animal relationship is marked by fear.

Will it always be that way? No. The day is coming when the lion will lay down with the lamb. When? In the kingdom age. In fact, Jesus gave the world a foretaste of His kingdom power when He performed His miracles, and the day is coming when He will reverse the effects of sin on the world once and for all.

I see a second change in verse 3, a change in *diet*. What did God tell Noah he could eat? "Everything that lives and moves will be food for you." Before the Flood, man was vegetarian--so were the animals. It's possible that he ate meat before the Flood, but without divine authorization. After the Flood, however, God permitted man to eat animals, too. T-bones. Chicken wings. Leg of lamb. It's okay now. But God gave one key stipulation as we'll see in verse 4.

So God wants life to be promoted. "Fill the earth," He told Noah and his sons. That was responsibility #1. Here's #2...

B. Life is to be protected (4-7). "But you must not eat meat that has its lifeblood still in it. 5 And for your lifeblood I will surely demand an accounting. I will demand an accounting from every animal. And from each man, too, I will demand an accounting for the life of his fellow man. 6 Whoever sheds the blood of man, by man shall his blood be shed; for in the image of God has God made man. 7 As for you, be fruitful and increase in number; multiply on the earth and increase upon it."

Life is to be promoted. It's also to be protected. Here God gives three specific instructions that deal with the protection of life.

1. *Don't eat blood (4).* Don't eat meat that has blood in it, God told Noah. Why not? The issue isn't merely

hygiene, but holiness. As far as God is concerned, there's something special about blood. Leviticus 17:14 twice declares that "the life of every creature is its blood."

In the Hebrew the word for "life" is *nephesh*. Elsewhere it's translated "soul." Without blood there is no "life." Henry Morris explains (118), "The blood of course performs the physiological function of conveying the necessary chemicals from the food and air to sustain and renew the physical flesh, and particularly to maintain the consciousness and the orderly thought-process of the brain. All of this complex of marvelous operations is called the 'life' or the 'soul,' the self-consciousness which distinguishes animal life from plant life."

So to protect life God said, don't eat blood. Secondly, He said...

2. *Don't shed blood (5)*. Whose blood? Verse 4 talks about animal blood. In verse 5 it's human blood.

Notice that. An animal's blood could be shed but not eaten. Human blood cannot even be shed. Why not? Because according to God, human life is sacred. Don't shed blood.

What happens if something or someone does? Instruction #3...

3. *Violators are held accountable (6)*. The word "accounting" appears three times in verse 5 ["require" in the KJV]. God is serious about the sanctity of human life. He holds violators *accountable*.

You might be thinking, "Wait a minute. I'm not accountable to anyone but *myself*." Not so. Am I my brother's keeper? Yes. I am accountable to God for how I treat you.

We have a cheap view of life these days. Abortion isn't wrong, it's a matter of personal preference. Euthanasia isn't wrong, it's an act of mercy. Murder isn't wrong, as long as you don't get caught--and even then it's no big deal if you can find a loophole in the legal system.

Apparently, before the Flood it was even worse. From Adam to Noah there was no formal, God-given structure in place for crime prevention. In the pre-Flood world we find a man named Lamech boasting that he murdered a man merely for hurting him (4:23). And the heroes of the day were the Nephilim, evidently people of great size and strength that make a name for themselves by practicing aggression (6:4). By the time Noah came along, the brutality was so bad that God's assessment went like this (6:11), "Now the earth was corrupt in God's sight and was *full of violence*."

But after the Flood God took steps to prevent the development of similar conditions. In Genesis 9 He established the basis for human government. And right here He put in place a deterrent for needless murder and bloodshed. *The death penalty*.

"Whoever sheds the blood of man, by man shall his blood be shed; for in the image of God has God made man (6)."

Later, when God gave the Israelites the Law, He elaborated on this. For instance, according to Exodus 21:28-29, if an ox gored a man to death, what was to happen to the ox? It was to be executed.

That's significant. Can a human being take the life of an animal? Yes, God authorized the meat for food and even the coats for clothing. But are animals given the same freedom with respect to human beings? They are not. And why not? What's different about mankind? We find the answer at the end of verse 6--only man is made in the "image of God."

Please notice that though man is a sinner, he is still God's image-bearer. Why is the sanctity of human life so important? Here's why. *Image*, God's image. To show contempt for man is to show contempt for God. Why?

Man is created in the image of God.

Listen. This may not be socially acceptable or politically correct, but it is the command of God. God told Noah and his sons that life is to be promoted and protected.

That's why I want to take a moment and recognize a ministry that's on the frontlines of this battle for life. It's *Cradle*. *Cradle* is designed to bring hope to those in crisis pregnancy situations by pointing them to the hope available in Jesus Christ. I want to commend those who are investing their time, energy, and money into promoting and protecting life. And I would encourage others to prayerfully consider getting involved.

God revealed two things to Noah and his sons. The first were His commands, commands regarding life. Here's the second.

II. God revealed His covenant (8-17).

Notice verses 8-11, "Then God said to Noah and to his sons with him: 9 'I now establish my covenant with you and with your descendants after you 10 and with every living creature that was with you -- the birds, the livestock and all the wild animals, all those that came out of the ark with you -- every living creature on earth. 11 I establish my covenant with you: Never again will all life be cut off by the waters of a flood; never again will there be a flood to destroy the earth.'"

The covenant with Noah is the first explicit covenant in the Bible. Who initiated it? God did. To whom did God deliver the covenant stipulations? He spoke to Noah and his sons, but the scope of this covenant went far beyond them, as we'll discuss in a moment.

But first, this question. *Just what is a covenant?* Bruce Shelley offers this explanation: "In modern times we define a host of relations by contracts. These are usually for goods or services and for hard cash. The contract, formal or informal, helps to specify failure in these relationships. The Lord did not establish a contract with Israel or with the church. He created a covenant.

"There is a difference. Contracts are broken when one of the parties fails to keep his promise. If, let us say, a patient fails to keep an appointment with a doctor, the doctor is not obligated to call the house and inquire, 'Where were you? Why didn't you show up for your appointment?' He simply goes on to his next patient and has his appointment secretary take note of the patient who failed to keep the appointment. The patient may find it harder the next time to see the doctor. He broke an informal contract.

"According to the Bible, however, the Lord asks: 'Can a mother forget the baby at her breast and have no compassion on the child she has borne? Though she may forget, I will not forget you!' (Isaiah 49:15) The Bible indicates the covenant is more like the ties of a parent to her child than it is a doctor's appointment. If a child fails to show up for dinner, the parent's obligation, unlike the doctor's, isn't canceled. The parent finds out where the child is and makes sure he's cared for. One member's failure does not destroy the relationship. A covenant puts no conditions on faithfulness. It is the unconditional commitment to love and serve."

Granted, there are different kinds of covenants in the Bible. Some are unconditional, others conditional. Yet in essence, a covenant is a promise-based, binding agreement between two parties. Here's a sampling of the covenants mentioned in the Bible, adapted from *The New Unger's Bible Handbook*:

Eternal covenant, Hebrews 13:20: The redemptive covenant before time began, between the Father and the Son. By this covenant we have eternal redemption, an eternal peace from the 'God of peace', through the death and resurrection of the Son.

Abrahamic covenant, Genesis 12:1-3; confirmed 13:14-17; 15:1-7; 17:1-8: The covenant of promise.

Abraham's posterity was to be made a great nation. In him (through Christ) all the families of the earth were to be blessed (Galatians 3:16; John 8:56-58).

Mosaic covenant, Exodus 20:1-31:18: The legal covenant, given solely to Israel. It consisted of the commandments (Exodus 20:1-26); the judgments (social) - (Exodus 21:1; 24:11) and the ordinances (religious); (Exodus 24:12-31:18); also called the law. It was a conditional covenant of works, a ministry of 'condemnation' and 'death' (2 Corinthians 3:7-9), designed to lead the transgressor (convicted thereby as a sinner) to Christ.

Palestinian covenant, Deut 30:1-10: The covenant regulating Israel's tenure of the land of Canaan. Its prophetic features include dispersion of disobedience (Deuteronomy 30:1), future repentance while in dispersion (30:2), the Lord's return (30:3), the restoration (30:4-5, national conversion (3:6), judgment of Israel's foes (30:7), national prosperity (30:9). Its blessings are conditioned upon obedience (30:8,10), but fulfillment is guaranteed by the new covenant.

Davidic covenant, 2 Samuel 7:4-17, 1 Chr 17:4-15: The kingdom covenant regulating the temporal and eternal rule of David's posterity. It secures in perpetuity a Davidic 'house' or line, a throne, and a kingdom. It was confirmed by divine oath in Psalm 89:30-37 and renewed to Mary in Luke 1:31-33. It is fulfilled in Christ as the World's Saviour and Israel's coming King (Acts 1:6; Rev 19:16; 20:4-6).

New covenant, Jeremiah 31:31-33; Matthew 26:28; Mark 14:24; Luke 22:20; Hebrew 8:8-12: The covenant of unconditional blessing based upon the finished redemption of Christ. It secures blessing for the church, flowing from the Abrahamic covenant (Galatians 3:13-20), and secures all covenant blessings to converted Israel, including those of the Abrahamic, Palestinian, and Davidic covenants. This covenant is unconditional, final and irreversible.

Most covenants have at least two ingredients. There are covenant stipulations, and there's a covenant sign. We see both in the Noahic covenant.

A. Here are the stipulations (8-11). I should mention that *God* established the stipulations, not man. Two things are true of the Noahic covenant.

1. *It's universal* (8-10). God said this promise was for Noah, for Noah's sons, and for every living creature that had been with Noah on the ark. That included birds, livestock, and wild animals. This was for *every* creature. This covenant is universal.

2. *It's unchanging* (11). "Never again will all life be cut off by the waters of a flood." Never again.

Please notice man has no part in this covenant. It's unilateral. Does God need man's permission to establish a covenant? No, He does not. He is God. In this covenant, as with every covenant, He established the stipulations. That's not all He established.

B. Here is the sign (12-17). "And God said, 'This is the sign of the covenant I am making between me and you and every living creature with you, a covenant for all generations to come: 13 I have set my rainbow in the clouds, and it will be the sign of the covenant between me and the earth. 14 Whenever I bring clouds over the earth and the rainbow appears in the clouds, 15 I will remember my covenant between me and you and all living creatures of every kind. Never again will the waters become a flood to destroy all life. 16 Whenever the rainbow appears in the clouds, I will see it and remember the everlasting covenant between God and all living creatures of every kind on the earth.'

17 So God said to Noah, 'This is the sign of the covenant I have established between me and all life on the earth.'"

The sign of the Abrahamic covenant was circumcision. The sign of the Sinaitic covenant was the Sabbath. What is the sign of the Noahic covenant? The rainbow. And what was the purpose of the rainbow? This sign fulfilled a twofold purpose.

1. *The rainbow reminds God.* That's interesting. Signs are connected with other covenants in the Bible, but usually the signs are intended to remind *people* of their covenant obligations. In this case the sign serves to remind *God* of His promises.

God said: "Whenever I bring clouds over the earth and the rainbow appears in the clouds, I will remember my covenant (14-15)." And, "Whenever the rainbow appears in the clouds, I will see it and remember the everlasting covenant between God and all living creatures of every kind on the earth (16)."

You say, "Why does God need a reminder? Does He forget?" No way. But He wants us to remember that He remembers! Though implicit, that's the second reason for the sign...

2. *The rainbow reminds us.* Henry Morris is right, "Just as the fossil-bearing rocks of the earth's crust should continually remind us that God once destroyed the earth with a Flood, so the rainbow after the rain should remind us that he will never do so again."

Answer this. Is the Noahic covenant still in place? Have you seen any rainbows recently? Let's talk application. We learn some tremendous truths about God from this account?

Implications: What do we learn about God from this?

Allow me to summarize with four truths.

1. *God makes promises.* We've seen one this morning, but the fact is, the Bible is full of divine promises. No one forces Him to make promises. He does so of His own choice, uninfluenced by anything outside of Himself. It is God's gracious nature to make promises. Quite honestly, we would be in big trouble were that not the case.

2. *God wants us to know His promises.* That's why He gave the sign of the rainbow. He is a revealing God. He doesn't want us to wander around, wondering what He's up to. He wants us to know His promises. He wants us to know *Him*.

Are you interested? Are you tired of wandering in life without purpose and meaning? Oh, dear friend, God has revealed Himself. How? In His Word, and ultimately, in His Son. Jesus Christ came to earth, lived, died as a ransom payment for sinners, and then rose again. Why? To reconcile sinners like us to God.

Do you want to know God? Then repent and believe in Christ. You say, "How can I be sure God will save *me*?" The answer is, because He *promised* He would (Acts 16:31).

Yes, God makes promises. And God wants us to know His promises. That's why He recorded them in His Word.

3. *God keeps His promises.* God has never broken a promise. Never. It's an impossibility. He is faithful and true.

Do you know what that means? You can trust Him. In a world full of promise-breakers, you can trust God. Why? Because by His very nature, He is a promise-keeper.

You may be stinging today because of broken promises. Is there hope? Proverbs 29:25 says, "Fear of man will prove to be a snare, but whoever trusts in the LORD is kept safe." That's a promise!

4. *God wants us to live in light of His promises.* "'Tis so sweet to trust in Jesus, just to take Him at His word, just to rest upon His promise, just to know 'Thus saith the Lord.' Jesus, Jesus, how I trust Him! How I've proved Him o'er and o'er! Jesus, Jesus, precious Jesus! O for grace to trust Him more!"