

# (Genesis) 18 - the Universal Covenant

by S. Lewis Johnson

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*The Noahic covenant is an unconditional covenant between God and all living creatures, setting the stage for the rest of the biblical covenants and God's plan of redemption.*

**Duration:** 49:43

**Scripture:** Isaiah 54:7

**Topics:** "Covenant"

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## Description

In this sermon, the preacher discusses the concept of God's grace and the importance of recognizing our own insignificance before receiving God's blessings. He shares a story about a man hanging onto a bush on the side of a cliff, desperately calling for help. When a divine voice offers assistance, the man hesitates and asks if there is anyone else who can help him. The preacher emphasizes that we cannot break God's laws, but rather, we can only illustrate them. He also explores the covenant between God and Noah, highlighting the confirmation of the cultural mandate and the importance of the everlasting Covenant of Redemption.

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## Transcript

Returning to Genesis chapter 9 and reading verses 1 through 17. You will remember that the flood has taken place and Noah and his family and the animals with him have come through on the other side. Noah and two of all of the animals, seven of the unclean animals together with the members of his family.

There is some tradition that there were three camels that came into the ark instead of two. I don't know whether you've heard this tradition or not, but I understand that it happened something like this. As the camels were entering the ark and were on the gangplank, there were three of them and Noah called out, hey, one of you will have to stay ashore.

And the first one spoke and said, I'm the camel, so many people swallow when straining out a net. And then the second one said, and I'm the camel whose back was broken by the last straw. And the third said, and I'm the camel which shall pass through the eye of a needle sooner than a rich man shall enter into the kingdom of heaven.

And Noah was puzzled, scratched his head in perplexity and finally deciding that posterity could not afford to spare any of these and would be lost for illustrations, he had decided that the three should come on board. Now, that's not in the Bible. So that's not a very well attested tradition.

But anyway, the animals are on board and have now come out and Noah has offered his sacrifices and the sacrifices are expressions of thanksgiving and of course remind us of the fact that all of the blessings of God are grounded in redemption. So now we have in Genesis chapter 9 the unfolding of the universal or the Noahic covenant. We begin reading at verse 1. And God blessed Noah and his sons and said to them, be fruitful and multiply and fill the earth.

And the fear of you and the terror of you shall be on every beast of the earth and on every bird of the sky with everything that creeps on the ground and all the fish of the sea into your hand they are given. Every moving thing that is alive shall be food for you. I give all to you as I gave the green plant.

Only you shall not eat flesh with its life that is its blood. And surely I will require your life blood. From every beast I will require it and from every man, from every man's brother will I require the life of man.

Whoever sheds man's blood by man his blood shall be shed. For in the image of God he made man. And as for you be fruitful and multiply, populate the earth abundantly and multiply in it.

Then God spoke to Noah and to his sons with him saying, now behold I myself do establish my covenant with you and with your descendants after you. The words I myself are rather emphatic in the Hebrew text and there is a great deal of stress upon them and I mention it to you because it underlines the fact that this covenant is an unconditional covenant. God determines to do what he says he will do in this covenant and it is done apart from the cooperation of man.

Now in verse 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 comes out of the ark, even every beast of the earth. That's to be noted. This covenant is something that is that pertains not only to human beings but also to the animal world or the wild kingdom.

And I establish my covenant with you and all flesh shall never again be cut off by the water of the flood, neither shall there again be a flood to destroy the earth. And God said this is the sign of the covenant which I am making between me and you and every living creature that is with you for all successive generations. I set my bow in the cloud and it shall be for a sign of a covenant between me and the earth and it shall come about when I bring a cloud over the earth that the bow shall be seen in the cloud and I will remember my covenant which is between me and you and every living creature of all flesh and never again shall the water become a flood to destroy all flesh.

When the bow is in the cloud, then I will look upon it to remember the everlasting covenant between God and every living creature of all flesh that is on the earth. 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. May God bless this reading of his word.

The universal covenant. The inhabitants of the ark, including the three camels, are now on dry ground and the first of the biblical covenants comes before the reader in the ninth chapter of this great book of Genesis. When we think of the covenants of the Bible, our thoughts go not only to the biblical covenants set forth in Scripture itself, but to the covenants of covenant theology.

Many of you in this audience know that there are different systems of theology. I think that probably one of the most well-known of the systems of theology has been covenant theology. And other forms of theology have also existed.

There is Lutheran theology, which is in some ways related to covenant theology. Some have even spoken of dispensational theology, although in my own personal opinion that expression is not really quite accurate. But at least looming large in the thought of biblical interpretation is covenant theology.

Covenant theology generally is gathered around three of the theological covenants. There is first the covenant of redemption made between the persons of the Trinity. The Father having certain responsibilities having to do with election and determining to do them.

And then the Son having certain responsibilities, such as the carrying out of the work of atonement by dying upon the cross and executing that. And the Holy Spirit, the third person of the Trinity, carrying out the responsibilities of applying the work of redemption that the Son has accomplished at the direction of the electing Father. The idea of an everlasting covenant of redemption is something that is largely derived from inferences in the Word of God.

Dr. Lewis Perry Chaffer, who was not a covenant theologian in the strict sense, nevertheless affirmed in his systematic theology that the covenant of redemption was a biblical concept. He acknowledged that the scriptural support for it was meager, but nevertheless that it was demanded by the logic and inevitability of its teaching. Now there are other ways in which this covenant is referred to.

For example, we do read from the Apostle Paul that he had an eternal purpose. That is, that the triune God had an eternal purpose. And that eternal purpose had to do with redemption.

And so when we speak of the covenant of redemption, we are speaking about the eternal purpose of God, in which the Father has responsibilities, the Son and the Spirit, and they are carrying them out to the ultimate salvation of all of the elect and of all associated with them, their relationship to this creation in which they have been placed. The covenant of redemption, the everlasting covenant of redemption between the persons of the Trinity. Then covenant theologians have spoken of a covenant of works.

Again, this expression precisely is not found in the Bible. Everlasting covenant is, but covenant of works is not found, strictly speaking, in the Bible. Even some dispensational theologians, however, have acknowledged the Edenic covenant by which they refer to the arrangement in the probation of man in the Genesis, in Genesis chapter 2. This covenant of works is a covenant made between God and Adam, in which Adam had certain responsibilities and God gave certain threats and promises.

Now we know that that covenant of works was not an unconditional covenant, but a conditional covenant, according to Genesis 2, verses 16 and 17. And that covenant Adam broke. In Hosea chapter 6 and verse 7 there appears to be a reference to the covenant.

They, like Adam, have transgressed the covenant, which would seem to be biblical justification for the term covenant of works. But whether we call it the Edenic covenant, the covenant of works, or simply the probation of Adam, the idea of a covenant seems to be found in Genesis chapter 2. And then the covenant of grace is the third of the theological covenants. The covenant of grace is the covenant by which the triune God determines to exercise grace toward the elect whom the Father has chosen.

In other words, it is His determination to save the elect. Now I like to think of the term covenant of grace as a reference to the messianic promises of the Old Testament. All of those promises, as they unfold, are features of a covenant of grace.

The term covenant of grace is not found in the Bible. But again, the idea of God carefully, at great cost, the cost of the death of Christ, gathering His elect chosen in ages past into the family of God, is surely a biblical concept and especially precious to all of us who have been saved. Isaiah speaks of this in the 53rd chapter of his book, in the 42nd chapter, the 6th verse.

And so there seems to be some justification for believing that these theological covenants express ideas that are truly scriptural. Now we must remember, of course, that the system as such is not taught directly in a single passage of Scripture. In fact, someone, an opponent of the idea, has suggested that the covenants were made in Holland and not in heaven.

And of course that is largely true in the sense that it was the Dutch theologians who developed the system that lies back of covenant theology. But nevertheless, the ideas are scriptural, I think we would have to agree. The Bible is covenantally structured.

In other words, the messianic grace is unfolded according to a plan of the ages. And it is released through the instrumentality of covenants and promises designed to glorify God. So when we think about the Bible, we think about the divine system or the divine order of the covenants by which the blessings of God become ours through the instrumentality of the work of Christ and the promises related to it.

Now it's unfortunate that some dispensationally oriented theologians, in a kind of pathological rejection of everything in covenant theology, have failed to treat properly the covenantal structure of Scripture. I don't want to attack dispensational theology wholly, but it is true that they have been so afraid of acknowledging the truth of anything in covenant theology that they have tended to give the impression that the Bible is structured around the dispensations rather than around the covenants. In a sense, the covenants of Scripture are the historical unfolding of the eternal covenant of redemption.

And so the historical covenants, the Noahic covenant, the Abrahamic covenant, the Davidic covenant, the New Covenant, these are simply the unfolding in time of the eternal or the ancient promises made by God to the elect through the work of the Son in times past. The dispensations of Scripture set forth the historical stages in the process of the divine revelation against the background of which the covenant program of God is worked out to its glorious consummation. So in my own mind I like to think of the covenants as the program of God from the divine side, whereas the dispensations focus attention on the human aspects of things, and we're speaking somewhat generally.

But since the Bible is covenantally structured, and since the Bible is written largely from the divine standpoint, we should stress the covenantal program if we are to stress one of these more than the other. So when we turn now to the Noahic covenant, we are turning to one of the historical covenants important for the fulfillment of all of the Messianic promises, which are aspects of the eternal covenant of redemption. In fact, to my mind, it's all very simple and clear.

The Bible is covenantally structured, and if we understand the covenants of Scripture, we're a long way to understanding what God has been doing and will be doing in the future. The Noahic covenant is the first explicit covenant. That is, it is the first covenant that is called a covenant by that very term in the Bible.

Now we do read back in chapter 6 and verse 18 that before the flood came God said to Noah, I will establish my covenant with you. That's the first occurrence of the word covenant in the Bible, and what we have in chapter 9 is the expansion of that covenant which God promised that he would make with Noah. It is the first explicit covenant and it is notable for its breadth.

It includes every living creature, not only Noah and the seven who came out of the ark with him, but it even includes the animal world as well. So it is notable for its breadth. It is notable also for its permanence, because it is a covenant that is everlasting.

It is notable for its generosity. It is an unconditional covenant, and it is notable because of its sign, the rainbow. The rainbow stresses the divine initiative, and I think that what we are to learn by this Noachic covenant and the fact of the sign that stresses it, is first of all that this covenant isn't a covenant, a covenant that is quite different from human covenants, generally speaking.

Man has no position of strength in the unconditional covenants of the Bible. The covenant that God made with Noah is not one that is hammered out over endless sessions between representatives of the Lord and representatives of man. We do not have the foreign minister of heaven coming to earth and dealing with the foreign minister of Noah and so on.

This is a covenant in which God holds all of the key cards. It is an unconditional covenant. We have no confused and frustrated deity, as I have been saying over and over again recently.

We do not have a God who works at cross purposes within himself, nor do we have a God who is frustrated by man. So the covenants represent the gracious condescension of a sovereign to his helpless subjects. And if any covenant expresses the unconditionality of God's dealing with men, it is this Noachic covenant, because it's very difficult for us to bring about a rainbow in the skies.

And that in itself illustrates how unconditional the blessings of God are in this respect. So the Noachic covenant, in it we have what someone has called the rules of the game. We have no options, I say, God determines them all.

We cannot break his laws, we can illustrate them. A friend of mine, a former student of mine, has written a book on Genesis and he says it's impossible to break the laws of God, you can only illustrate them. If you jump from a thirty-story building, you will not break the law of gravity, you will only illustrate it.

And then he added, that's what's called jumping to a conclusion. It is true, we cannot break the law of God, the law of God breaks us. So this covenant is one from which God, one from which God speaks in control of all of the affairs of men.

Well let's look at it now, and I want to look rather briefly at some of the first parts of it and then notice in a little more detail some of the latter parts. Now the chapter opens with the confirmation of the cultural mandate. Remember, God had given man the mandate, be fruitful, multiply, fill the earth, and subdue it.

It does not mention that they are to subdue it in chapter 9, so far as I remember, perhaps because now that man has fallen, the idea of subduing the earth is something that is left only ultimately to the man Christ Jesus, or perhaps it's to be understood. But the cultural mandate is to be fruitful, to multiply, and to fill the earth. The cultural mandate is something that we may obey in faith or we may apostatize from it.

God has given Christians a particular calling in this society in which we live. We're not to be like some of the paths of the Anabaptists and withdraw from society, because the Bible says we are in the world, and consequently we are to live in the world. The idea that Christians are to withdraw from the world and have no contact with the world is really an attempt to fulfill the cultural mandate contrary to Scripture.

On the other hand, we should not take the approach of Constantine, who proclaimed, who when he proclaimed Christianity the religion of the Roman Empire, made it an incentive for all of the priests of heathendom to flock into Christianity through baptisms. In other words, we should not bring the church into the world, and we should not bring the world into the church. We are in the world, we are not of the world, but the responsibility rests upon us as Christians to fulfill the cultural mandate.

Now to put it in practical language, I think what this means is that it means that if you are a physician, for example, you should be the best physician that you can possibly be and know your subject as only it can be known at the present time. If you're a lawyer, lawyers can get to heaven. If you are a lawyer, it means that you are to be the finest kind of lawyer.

You should be a legal scholar, an expert in your field, and to treat your field as something, as a divine calling that God has given to you. If you're a businessman, an insurance man, or whatever it may be, you ought to be the best kind of insurance man that you can be. Know your insurance.

Know the theory of insurance. Know its application. Be an illustration of mastering that particular field.

If you're a laborer, you should be an illustration of what a Christian laborer should be, an expert in his field, a master of an art, a master of a craft, whatever it may be. That is part of the fulfillment of the cultural mandate. And the calling that God puts upon you is just as significant a calling ultimately as the calling to the ministry of the Word of God.

If it should be that He has called some of you to minister the Word of God, you should be the kind of minister that God would have you to be. Know your Bible. Know the scriptures.

Spend time in the study of them. Know everything that's necessary to expound them well. Know Greek.

Know Aramaic. Know Hebrew. Know the things that are necessary.

Study theology. Study the books of the Bible so that you can expound the scriptures in a way that will bring honor to the Lord who has called you to this specific task. So the cultural mandate.

And there's one other thing. Did you notice it says be fruitful and multiply? Now I think that what that speaks of first of all is procreation. Be fruitful and multiply.

The psalmist says, happy is the man that hath his quiver full of children. They shall not be ashamed but they shall speak with the enemy in the gate. And also the Bible speaks about the children of youth.

That's important too. I'm always a little saddened. This by the way is not in the Bible.

But I'm always a little saddened when I see an old man have little children. Now of course that's better than having none, but I just think of all the problems that an old man has with little children. Just catching them is enough.

God was very wise when he said to have children in your youth. When you can handle them. So procreation.

Why? Why to instruct them in the word of God. To give them the doctrines of Holy Scripture. Bring them up in the nurture and admonition of the Lord.

We bring our children up in the fear of the Lord. Today the world lives in fear of the child. And the panel of experts that makes man the measure of all things and jumps from one extreme to another in its child psychology.

The greatest of the child psychology is found right in the word of God. Teach them the word of God. Instruct them.

Be fruitful. Multiply. God has chosen a vast company of people to be his people throughout eternity.

And even in the simple act of procreation we fulfill the will of God and make it possible on the human level for the whole family of the elect to be gathered together ultimately in heaven. He will not be frustrated. Fruitful.

Now he also speaks about government. And the fear of you and the terror of you shall be on every beast of the earth and on every bird of the sky with everything that creeps on the ground and all the fish of the sea into your hand they are given. Just a word.

Sin. The sin of man brought terror to the animals and from now instead of living in an affectionate relationship the animals and man are at disharmony one with another. The animals are fearful of man and they fight among themselves so that fang and tooth and claw replace the gentle submission that God originally intended and which shall ultimately be restored.

But the wild kingdom is not to prevail and so God speaks in his word about things that should be done to prevent the animal kingdom from overcoming the kingdom of man. Oxes that gore individuals are to be put to death. Capital punishment for the animals.

It is spoken of in Holy Scripture. And he speaks about food. He says every morning every moving thing that is alive shall be food for you.

I give all to you as I gave the green plant. Now from now on after the flood men are to live by the death of others. It's almost as if it were pedagogical.

It's designed to teach us that true life comes from death and the ultimate expression of it is the Lord Jesus Christ who died in order that we might feed upon his flesh and blood and have eternal life. Then in verses four through seven he speaks of the establishment of human government and the issue of capital punishment comes before us here. Now it would be nice to talk about this for a lengthy period of time.

We cannot do it otherwise we shall be forever in the book of Genesis. Notice the fourth verse. Only you shall not eat flesh with its life that is its blood and surely I will require your life blood.

From every beast I will require it and from every man from every man's brother I will require the life of man. Whoever sheds man's blood by man his blood shall be shed. Life is in the blood we are told in Scripture and all doctors know that the blood acts as that which keeps alive the human body.

Life is in the blood and thus it's God's because life belongs to God. This has something to say about some of the issues that face us today such as the issue of abortion but we don't have time to make application. Speaking of human government we have the philosophy of authority here.

Whoever sheds man's blood by man his blood shall be shed. Now there are differences of opinion about the meaning of this text but I think that generally we must believe that what he is saying here is that

authority is committed to man generally and civil authority in particular is committed to man. God has established government to punish evil and that is clear in the Old Testament and in the New.

The Apostle Paul in Romans chapter thirteen in verse four writing of that very thing. But two things are very clear. Number one human life is sacred and number two premeditated murder is evil and the language that God uses is very interesting because it is judicial language.

He speaks of requiring blood. Surely I will require your life blood. From every beast I will require it.

From every man's brother I will require the life of man. Three times he speaks judicially and it is God who executes the penalty of death. Now we have here the fact of government we do not have anything about the form of government.

We are not told for example that we should have a monarchy. We are not told that we should have an oligarchy. We are not told that we should have a democracy.

As a matter of fact all forms of human government are insufficient. In the final analysis the only form of government that is effectual is the government by God. Winston Churchill once said that of with reference to democracy something like it was the best of all of those bad forms of government.

The ultimate government is the government by God. But you will notice that authority is committed into the hands of man. Whoever sheds man's blood by man his blood shall be shed.

This raises a number of interesting questions. We are living in days in which we are told by many that capital punishment is bad. It is not a deterrent we are told as if capital punishment was designed to be simply a deterrent.

Reading the Bible you get an entirely different idea. Capital punishment is not designed to be a social deterrent. I think it is that but it is not designed to be that.

It is designed to be a moral and physical purgative. It is not designed to be a deterrent. It is designed to be a punishment for evil.

And one of the things that scripture tells us very plainly is that one of the reasons for the high incidence of illegal activities in the world is that activity on the part of men is the failure of men to carry out the divine requirements. And furthermore the scriptures tell us that if men do not carry out their responsibilities of human government then they subject themselves to the results of that which is increasing murder. What we are seeing today is the result of failure to exercise the divine commands.

In other words the high incidence of murder is the result. It is a judgment on men for their permissiveness. And the scriptures make it very plain that men are to carry out the requirements of God at their own peril.

Now some say well that sounds like the lex talionis, the law of retaliation. That is not what Moses is speaking about. He is not talking about such things as happened when the Campbells, if there are any Campbells here I understand this does not pertain to you, but any Scot knows about Glencoe.

He knows that in Glencoe a number of years ago the Campbells came. They were the traditional enemies of the McDonalds and for a month they lived among them in order to relax the defenses of the McDonalds and then in the famous massacre of Glencoe they slew a number of them. And everybody today when they go to Scotland they travel through Glencoe in order to see whether Campbells acted the traitors and

slew the McDonalds.

In this country they are named Hatfields and McCoys and such. Now we do not have that taught here. We are not told here when we say by man his blood shall be shed that we should take this judgment into our own hands.

That is not what he is talking about. Still others have said well after all if we have judicial execution that is murder and do we not add a second murder to a first? Now the simplest answer is to ask the individual who says that to look up the word murder in the dictionary and then look up the word execution. They are not the same things at all.

You know we are as I say living in rather strange days. But it appears from the statements of Holy Scripture here that one of the problems that we have is that we do not really understand what is involved when a man raises up his hand to slay another man. Look at the remainder of verse 6. For in the image of God he made man.

So when a man raises his hand with a hand of another man it is as if he has assaulted the government of God and therefore he lies beyond the protection of the divine will. To murder is to profane the holy creation of God. And while we human beings are we have a marred image of God it is nevertheless the image of God and to slay a man is to slay one who possesses the image of God and to tamper with the laws of God is to seek to be wiser than God himself.

We are living in days in which there is an attitude of sentimentality. In fact the concern often is not so much with the victim or the terribleness of the crime but with the murderer. And thus is revealed the sentimentality of humanistic thinking which has gripped the United States of America so strongly.

Whoever sheds man's blood by man his blood shall be shed. The immutable eternal God says. For in the image of God he made man.

Now the Noahic covenant is expounded in the remaining verses of this section and God now speaks to the whole family. Will you notice the eighth verse. Then God spoke to Noah and to his sons.

He speaks to those who are heirs of the new age and the basis of this blessing is the everlasting covenant of redemption. Do not forget that just preceding the ninth chapter Noah had come out of the ark and he had offered animals on the altar in sacrifice. And God had smelled a sweet savor and as those animals were burned God smelled the sweet savor.

He accepted the sacrifice and there is unfolded in the ninth chapter the Noahic covenant. In other words what we have here is the result of the atoning work of our Lord Jesus Christ. So we should think of this as a product of the everlasting covenant of redemption.

Now I'm just going to name some of the important theological aspects of the Noahic covenant. In the first place it is a divinely originated covenant. Look at the ninth verse.

Now behold I myself and in the Hebrew text that's very emphatic. I myself do establish my covenant with you and with your descendants after you. It is conceived by God.

It is devised by God. It is dispensed by God. It is a divine covenant.

Divinely originated. Not humanly originated. And second it is universal in scope.

It is made even with the beasts of the earth. Notice the last phrase of verse ten. Even every beast of the earth.

In other words flowing from the Noahic covenant is a common grace to all individuals including the animals. One might ask why this Noahic covenant at this stage? Well it's because there must be a stable historical background against which all the benefits of the other covenants which are soon to be given shall be played out. In other words we must have a stable immutable creation through the whole of the program of God.

And so he begins with I will no longer destroy the earth by a flood. Ultimately I shall with a fire. But in the meantime there will be the promise that things will prevail as they are now in order that the Abrahamic covenant, the Davidic covenant, the new covenant and the benefits of them may be played out historically.

So it is universal in scope for that reason. It is unconditional. Notice the ninth verse.

Now behold I myself do establish my covenant. Verse sixteen. He gives the rainbow in the sky in order to illustrate it.

There are no threats given to Adam or to Noah. He does not say now if you do this I will do this. He doesn't even say I bless those who have nothing.

We know that is true. We know of course that all of the blessings of God come to those who have nothing with which to commend themselves to God. This covenant is remarkable for its expression of unconditionality.

He performs it. And we receive the benefits of it. I know that we must come to the place where we recognize that we are nothing before any of the blessings of God come to us.

I was in Pittsburgh this last weekend preaching in the First Presbyterian Church in the Philadelphia Conference on Reformed Theology. And Jim Boyce, the pastor of the Tenth Presbyterian Church and the director of the conference was giving some, some, well really he was just giving some announcements. And in the course of it he referred to the free grace of God and he told a story.

He told a story of a man who was on the side of a hill and this hill led down to a cliff which went down for thousands of feet. And this man lost his footing and he began to roll down the mountainside and he rolled down to the cliff to certain depth and he rolled over the top of the cliff and just managed as he was hanging to grab hold of a little bush. And he was hanging there.

And he was holding on and finally he saw that his grip was beginning to fail and so he thought at least he could pray and so he shouted out, Help! Help! Is there somebody up there who can help me? It was a divine voice, divine sounding voice that came out very deep, Yes, I will help you. And he said, Yes, I will help you. But first you must let go of the bush.

He thought for a minute and he said, Is there anybody else up there who will help me? Now Mr. Boyce was using the story in order to illustrate the fact that if we're to receive blessing from the Lord there must be nothing upon which we lay hold for help. Well this covenant is an unconditional covenant. And we notice too it's everlasting and that rests upon the unconditionality of the covenant.

It's also a typical covenant because the rainbow suggests judgment dissipated by grace and Noah is the mediator and Noah's name means rest. Almost rest giver. Noah is a type of Christ.

And of course as a type of Christ, he is a type of him as the mediator by which the others are saved from the judgment of God. And the covenant is eschatological because it is the protected sphere in which the kingdom promises are played out. And finally it is illustrative of the promises that God made to Israel.

That's a remarkable passage in Isaiah chapter 54 and I'm going to read a few verses from it because it illustrates the sense in which the prophet understood the Noahic covenant. And just for the sake of time I will read only beginning at verse 7 of Isaiah 54. God is speaking about how Israel has been rejected but nevertheless she's going to be received.

And he says in verse 7, for a brief moment I forsook you but with great compassion I will gather you. In an outburst of anger I hid my face from you for a moment but with everlasting loving kindness I will have compassion on you says the Lord your Redeemer. For this is like the days of Noah to me when I swore that the waters of Noah should not flood the earth again.

So I have sworn that I will not be angry with you nor will I rebuke you for the mountains may be removed and the hills may shake but my loving kindness will not be removed from you and my covenant of peace will not be shaken says the Lord who has compassion on you. In other words the Noahic covenant with its unconditional everlasting blessings is designed to illustrate the way in which God is going to save the nation Israel and bring them to himself in the future. Not long ago I read a remarkable statement by a person who was not a Bible teacher at all.

She was discussing the question of Israel and the Arabs and she said the problem therefore turns on the concepts of election and covenant. If one is prepared to accept that these have not been abrogated then it follows that the bond which links Israel to the land has to be accepted as equally still in force. That's the way God looks upon the situation too.

And finally let me say just a word about the sign of the covenant. This is incidentally the longest section of this paragraph and it probably is designed to stress the fact that the emphasis is to be placed right here on this rainbow. Verse twelve.

This is the sign of the covenant. Verse thirteen. I set my bow in the cloud.

Now this rainbow is a very interesting thing. What's required for a rainbow? Well the rainbow requires for its manifestation clouds of a storm. The liquid droplets in the air being necessary and it requires the sunlight.

And so the sun's rays falling generally upon the departing dark clouds produce the rainbow. Isn't that striking? Because we have the departing dark clouds suggestive of storm and then the sun's rays falling upon it suggesting the blessings of life beyond the storm. And so the rainbow is designed by God to be a continual reminder of the fact that the judgment of the flood is over and that there will no longer be this universal flood to destroy all of life by water.

But looking on beyond the rainbow it suggests to us the ministry of the Lord Jesus Christ who in his work on Calvary's cross in the storm of divine judgment, the lightning and the thunder of the divine penalties that fell upon him has borne them to the full. When he cried out, My God, my God, why hast thou forsaken me? He was bearing all of the dark clouds of judgment upon sinners, the sinners of his people. And now

as a result of having borne them to the full, when he cried out, It is finished, the sun's rays began to shine.

And the rainbow of the unconditional promise of the forgiveness of sins is now the possession of all who acknowledging their lost condition come to him to receive as a free gift everlasting life. What a beautiful picture in this early stage of the book of Genesis of the triumph of grace over judgment. And our Lord is the supreme victor.

The fact that the bow is set high in the clouds beyond man's reach is the pledge that it comes apart from any human endeavor. As a matter of fact it is the product of prevenient grace, that grace of God that comes and changes our wills from unwillingness to willingness, brings us to faith and repentance and the possession of the forgiveness of sins. If you're here in the audience this morning and you have never believed in the Lord Jesus Christ, you're lost.

The lightning, the thunder, the clouds of divine judgment shall fall upon you and your ultimate destination, the road upon which you are traveling, leads to the lake of fire. Those are the plain words of Holy Scripture. But Christ has died for sinners and you may have the forgiveness of sins as you receive as a free gift eternal life.

For by grace are we saved through faith and that not of ourselves. It is the gift of God, not of works lest any man should boast. We're not saved by joining the church.

We're not saved by praying through. We're not saved by doing good works. We're not saved by being cultured or educated, not saved by being good citizens or excellent businessmen or generally good in the payment of our debts.

We're not saved because we're citizens of the United States, because we're members of a Christian nation so called. We are only saved through the finished work of the Lord Jesus Christ. We are not saved by baptism.

We are not saved by sitting at the Lord's table. May God so work in your heart that you come to Christ. You're not saved by raising your hand in a meeting, not saved by coming down front, not saved by signing a decision card.

The proper way to express your faith according to the Bible is to be baptized in water. May God speak to your heart. May you come in faith, receiving the gift of eternal life and then also in testimony to it.

May you come to the elders and seek to be baptized in water in confession of what has happened to you. Let's stand for the benediction. Father, we are grateful to thee for these ancient chapters which so beautifully prefigure all that is ultimately plain through the work of the Lord Jesus Christ.

We thank thee for the assurance of a stable existence that we have as a result of the Noachic Covenant. And we thank thee for all of the other covenants and especially the new covenant by which we have the forgiveness of sins. Truly we are blessed, O God.

May we realize it through thee. Enable us to truly serve thee and fulfill the mandate that thou hast given to thy servants in the time that we have. May grace, mercy, and peace abide upon each of us and especially upon those who may be here who have not yet come to trust in Christ.

O Father, bring them to him, we do pray, through Jesus Christ our Lord. Amen.

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