



We finished off the account of Noah this Sunday with Genesis 9. We considered God's response to the lingering fear Noah and his family probably felt as they rightly feared that God may judge again.

1 – A promise for *all* – life through God's covenant (v1-17)

Across 4 speeches, God promised Noah that humans would live on and be fruitful (speech 1, v1-7), and established his promise with a covenant (speeches 2-4, v8-17).

God began by repeating his creation command (compare v1 with 1v28), but altering the relationship with animals (v2-3) and forbidding the taking of human life (v4-7). God then made a commitment that he would not destroy all life with a flood again (v9-11, 15). He marked this covenant with a rainbow – a reminder to him of his promise (v12-17). How incredible that though humans were still sinful (8v21), God would make such a commitment to them and ask nothing in return!

This is a promise for us too. Whatever our fears regarding climate change, God has promised he will not send a worldwide flood again. Also, he has promised us here his common grace, and with that a steadiness and stability to earthly life. Tragedies may still occur, but God's final judgment will come only at the time he has chosen.

2 – A blessing for *some* – prosperity through their obedience (v18-29)

Though all Noah's descendants would receive God's covenantal promise of continued life on earth, only some would receive his blessing. In the next scene, Ham sees his father naked and tells his brothers, who cover him up while painstakingly avoiding seeing him in his shame (v20-23). Noah curses Ham's family (v25) and blesses the families of his brothers (v26-27).

The writer does not dwell on Noah's sin, explain why Ham's sin is so bad, explain why it is Ham's son *Canaan* who is cursed, or make explicit that it is *God* who curses and blesses here. We see elsewhere in Scripture that drunkenness is wrong (eg. Hab 2v15, Eph 5v18). We can infer that Ham's actions were not accidental. We also see later in Genesis that the line of Canaan were indeed sinful. The writer of Genesis perhaps here looks back and sees the sin of the children in their fathers.

Noah's covenant, it turns out, is enough to preserve life upon the earth, but not to guarantee blessing for any individual. A better covenant was needed. Wonderfully, it came: the one promised to the prophets and brought by Jesus. It is to this covenant, with its signs of bread and wine, that we as believers look not merely to be preserved in this life but to be saved for the next; not merely to have our physical lives extended but to be guaranteed new spiritual lives; not merely to be freed from captivity but to have our sins forgiven. With Jesus we are safe forever. Nothing can snatch us from his hands. There is no place for fear. Hallelujah!

Here are a few questions you might want to use with your group...

1. What do we remember of chapters 6-8? What point are we at in the story as we begin chapter 9? How might Noah and his family have been feeling?
2. In what ways do we long to be and feel safe? What lingering fears do we have?
3. What strikes you in God's four speeches in v1-17? What does God say and not say? What does he say that he will do? What does he require humans to do?
4. How does this covenant apply to us today? What does it give us confidence in? What 'gaps' does it leave – what things does it *not* promise/deal with?
5. What do you make of the strange story in v18-29? What questions do you have? What do you think the point of the account might be?
6. Why does a meritocratic society like ours find it so hard to see God bless some of Noah's descendants and curse others? How are we to deal with this truth?
7. How does this sad story point forward to what will happen later in Genesis/the Bible? How does it show us our need for the covenants that would follow, and for Jesus' new covenant? How is Jesus' covenant so much better (cf. Matt 26v27-29)?
8. How does this passage link to communion?