**Genesis 9 - God's Promise to Noah**

1 So God blessed Noah and his sons, and said to them: "Be fruitful and multiply, and fill the earth.

2 And the fear of you and the dread of you shall be on every beast of the earth, on every bird of the air, on all that move on the earth, and on all the fish of the sea. They are given into your hand.

3 Every moving thing that lives shall be food for you. I have given you all things, even as the green herbs.

4 But you shall not eat flesh with its life, that is, its blood.

5 Surely for your lifeblood I will demand a reckoning; from the hand of every beast I will require it, and from the hand of man. From the hand of every man's brother I will require the life of man.

6 "Whoever sheds man's blood, By man his blood shall be shed; For in the image of God He made man.

7 And as for you, be fruitful and multiply; Bring forth abundantly in the earth And multiply in it."

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,

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 go out of the ark, every beast of the earth.

11 Thus I establish My covenant with you: Never again shall all flesh be cut off by the waters of the flood; never again shall there be a flood to destroy the earth."

12 And God said: "This is the sign of the covenant which I make between Me and you, and every living creature that is with you, for perpetual generations:

13 I set My rainbow in the cloud, and it shall be for the sign of the covenant between Me and the earth.

14 It shall be, when I bring a cloud over the earth, that the rainbow shall be seen in the cloud;

15 and I will remember My covenant which is between Me and you and every living creature of all flesh; the waters shall never again become a flood to destroy all flesh.

16 The rainbow shall be in the cloud, and I will look on it to remember the everlasting covenant between God and every living creature of all flesh that is on the earth."

17 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."

**Noah and His Sons**

18 Now the sons of Noah who went out of the ark were Shem, Ham, and Japheth. And Ham was the father of Canaan.

19 These three were the sons of Noah, and from these the whole earth was populated.

20 And Noah began to be a farmer, and he planted a vineyard.

21 Then he drank of the wine and was drunk, and became uncovered in his tent.

22 And Ham, the father of Canaan, saw the nakedness of his father, and told his two brothers outside.

23 But Shem and Japheth took a garment, laid it on both their shoulders, and went backward and covered the nakedness of their father. Their faces were turned away, and they did not see their father's nakedness.

24 So Noah awoke from his wine, and knew what his younger son had done to him.

25 Then he said: "Cursed be Canaan;A servant of servantsHe shall be to his brethren."

26 And he said: "Blessed be the Lord,The God of Shem,And may Canaan be his servant.

27 May God enlarge Japheth,And may he dwell in the tents of Shem;And may Canaan be his servant."

28 And Noah lived after the flood three hundred and fifty years.

29 So all the days of Noah were nine hundred and fifty years; and he died.

**THE COVENANT WITH NOAH (9:1-17)**

**9:1-4**

God instructed Noah to be fruitful and increase in number and fill the earth (vv. 1,7) just as He had told Adam (1:28).

And Noah, like Adam, was to have dominion over animals (9:2; cf. 1:26,28).

Also both were given food to eat (9:3; cf. 1:29; 2:16) with one prohibition (9:5-6; cf. 2:17).

**9:5-7**

With Noah's new beginning came a covenant.

It was necessary now to have a covenant with obligations for mankind and a promise from God.

Because of the Flood's destruction of life people might begin to think that God holds life cheap and assume that taking life is a small matter.

This covenant shows that life is sacred and that man is not to destroy man, who is made in the image of God.

In essence, then, this covenant was established to ensure the stability of nature.

It helped guarantee the order of the world.

People would also learn that human law was necessary for the stability of life and that wickedness should not go unchecked as it had before.

So human government was brought in.

**9:8-17**

That this covenant (vv. 9,11-13,15-17) is cosmic and universal (every living creature, vv. 10 [twice], 12; all living creatures, vv. 15-16; all life, vv. 11,15,17) is seen from the rainbow God gave as a sign (vv. 12-13,17).

When it arches over the horizon after a rainfall it is an all-embracing sign of God's faithfulness to His work of grace.

Signs remind participants in a covenant to keep the stipulations.

In the rainbow God, who is omniscient, perpetually reminds Himself (repeated in vv. 15-16) never to flood the whole world again (vv. 11,15).

Since no rain had fallen before the Flood (2:5), no rainbow was needed.

Now when clouds clear, light refraction shows this marvelous display.

The rainbow arcs like a battle bow hung against the clouds.

The Heb. word for rainbow, qešet, is also the word for a battle bow.

Elsewhere in the Old Testament God referred to Judgment storms by using terms for bows and arrows.

The bow is now "put away," hung in place by the clouds, suggesting that the "battle," the storm, is over.

Thus the rainbow speaks of peace.

In the ancient Near East, covenant treaties were made after wars as a step toward embarking on peace.

Similarly God, after Judging sin, made a covenant of peace.

Israel certainly would be strengthened to see in the skies again and again God's pledge that He keeps His promise of grace.

But certainly it also reminded the faithful in Israel that God's Judgment was completed for that age.

Judgment will come once again in the end times (Zech 14:1-3; Rev 19:15) before there can be complete millennial peace and rest (Rev 20:6).

So Gen 9:8-17 anticipates that in the end Israel will beat her swords into plowshares (Isa 2:4; Mic 4:3).

In the meantime life goes on in a new order; the divine will of forbearance, "common grace," is at work until that end.

**THE CURSE OF CANAAN (9:18-29)**

This passage has several interpretive problems that have always plagued Bible scholars.

It is important to remember the purpose of the book, for this passage has direct reference to the nature and destiny of the Canaanites, Israel's antagonists.

**9:18-23**

Those who came out of the ark are identified, with the special note that Ham was the father of Canaan.

From Noah's three sons descended all the world's people.

The descendants of Shem were the Shemites from whom Abraham descended (cf. 10:21-31; 11:10-26).

Noah, "the man of the earth" (as the rabbis translated the words a man of the soil), began to plant a vineyard.

Though wine is said to cheer the heart (Judg 9:13; Ps 104:15) and alleviate the pain of the curse (Prov 31:6), it is also clear that it has disturbing effects.

Here Noah lay drunk and naked in his tent.

Intoxication and sexual looseness are hallmarks of pagans, and both are traced back to this event in Noah's life.

Man had not changed at all; with the opportunity to start a "new creation," Noah acted like a pagan (cf. Gen 6:5; 8:21).

The basic question concerns what Ham, Noah's youngest son, did (9:22,24) and why Noah cursed Ham's "son" Canaan (vv. 25-27).

Many fanciful ideas have been proposed.

The rabbis said Ham castrated Noah, thus explaining why Noah had no other sons.

Others claim that Ham slept with his mother, thus uncovering his father's nakedness, and that Canaan was the offspring of that union.

Others have said that Ham was involved in a homosexual attack on his father.

But the Hebrew expression here means what it says: Ham... saw his father's nakedness (v. 22).

He was not involved with Noah sexually, for in that case the Hebrew would be translated "he uncovered (causative form of galah) his father's nakedness."

Instead Noah had already uncovered himself (wayyitgal, reflexive form, v. 21), and Ham saw him that way.

To the ancients, however, even seeing one's father naked was a breach of family ethic.

The sanctity of the family was destroyed and the strength of the father was made a mockery.

Ham apparently stumbled on this accidentally, but went out and exultingly told his two brothers, as if he had triumphed over his father.

So what seems to be a trivial incident turned out to be a major event.

Noah's oracle (vv. 25-27) showed that the natures of his three sons would be perpetuated in their descendants.

In all but one of the verses in Lev 18:6-19, Moses used the causative form of the verb galah to refer to the Canaanites' (Ham's descendants) "uncovering" another's nakedness (rendered in the NIV, "have sexual relations").

This euphemism reports the actual licentious and repulsively immoral behavior of the descendants of Ham (cf. Lev 18:3).

Ham's disposition toward moral abandon thus bore fruit in the immoral acts of his descendants, the Canaanites.

**9:24-29**

Because of this incident Noah prophesied about his sons' descendants.

He began with the direct words, Cursed be Canaan!

However, Noah was not punishing Ham's son for something Ham did.

Instead, Noah's words referred to the nation of Canaanites that would come from Ham through Canaan.

Ham's act of hubris could not be left without repercussions.

A humiliation in like measure was needed, according to the principle of retributive justice.

Ham had made an irreparable breach in his father's family; thus a curse would be put on his son's family.

It has been suggested that Ham may have attempted to seize leadership over his brothers for the sake of his own line.

This would be similar to other ancient traditions about a son replacing his father.

But if he did his attempt failed, and his line through Canaan was placed not in leadership over other clansmen, but under them (v. 25).

Noah's oracle predicted that the Canaanites would be in servitude to the Shemites and Japhethites (vv. 26-27).

But this was because the Canaanites lived degrading lives like Ham, not because of what Ham did.

The point is that nationally, at least, drunken debauchery enslaves a people.

This is why, in God's program to bless Israel, the Canaanites were condemned.

They were to be Judged by God through the Conquest because their activities were in the same pattern and mold as their ancestor Ham.

The enslavement of Canaanites is seen in many situations in the history of the Old Testament.

Such a case turned up fairly soon; the Canaanites were defeated and enslaved by eastern kings (chap. 14).

Another example was the Gibeonites who later under Joshua became wood choppers and water carriers for Israel's tabernacle (Josh 9:27).

If the subjugation of Canaan to Japheth's line is to be carried to the extreme, as ±ebed (slave, Gen 9:26-27) sometimes implies, then it would go no further than the Battle of Carthage (146 B.C.) where the Phoenicians (who were Canaanites) were finally defeated.

But Noah's words seem to be more of a general than a specific prophecy, that the line of Shem will be blessed and the line of Ham in Canaan will be cursed.

This blessing-cursing motif is crucial in Genesis.

The Canaanites would have to be dispossessed from their place by Israel under Joshua in order for blessing to come on Shem (v. 26) and for the Japhethites to dwell in the tents of Shem (v. 27).

This meant that the Japhethites would live with the Shemites on friendly terms, not that the Japhethites would dispossess the Shemites.

So verses 24-29 actually set the foundation for Israel's foreign policy in the land (Deut 20:16-18).