

# A COVENANT OF SALVATION

Genesis 9:8-17

Tenth Sunday after Pentecost (Series B)

July 28, 2024

Trinity Free Lutheran Church, Grand Forks, ND

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The Old Testament lesson for the Tenth Sunday after Pentecost comes from Genesis, chapter 9, verses 8 through 17. This is the covenant that God made with Noah, his sons, and all of creation after the great flood. We see that, though God has wrath, he is also gracious and, above all, faithful. Please stand as you are able for the God's holy Word. From Genesis 9, beginning at verse 8, we read in Jesus' name.

<sup>8</sup> Then God said to Noah and to his sons with him, <sup>9</sup> "Behold, I establish my covenant with you and your offspring after you, <sup>10</sup> and with every living creature that is with you, the birds, the livestock, and every beast of the earth with you, as many as came out of the ark; it is for every beast of the earth. <sup>11</sup> I establish my covenant with you, that never again shall all flesh be cut off by the waters of the flood, and never again shall there be a flood to destroy the earth." <sup>12</sup> And God said, "This is the sign of the covenant that I make between me and you and every living creature that is with you, for all future generations: <sup>13</sup> I have set my bow in the cloud, and it shall be a sign of the covenant between me and the earth. <sup>14</sup> When I bring clouds over the earth and the bow is seen in the clouds, <sup>15</sup> I will remember my covenant that is between me and you and every living creature of all flesh. And the waters shall never again become a flood to destroy all flesh. <sup>16</sup> When the bow is in the clouds, I will see it and remember the everlasting covenant between God and every living creature of all flesh that is on the earth." <sup>17</sup> God said to Noah, "This is the sign of the covenant that I have established between me and all flesh that is on the earth."

*Father, these are your words. Sanctify us in the truth. Your Word is truth. Amen.*

You may be seated.

Grace, mercy, and peace to you from God our Father and our Lord Jesus Christ.

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God is faithful to his promises. He is faithful to humanity. He is faithful to all of his creation. When he makes a covenant, he keeps it, even when man is unfaithful and rebellious. God remains faithful. He is faithful to his promises.

And God is always working to save. Even when he pours out his wrath in destruction, as he once did in the flood, he is working out salvation.

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I realized this week, as I was preparing for this, that I have never preached on the flood here. After about ten years, it seems like it's about time. And, as far as I can tell, this passage is the only part of the flood story that appears in the lectionary. So we will give special attention to these verses, but we will also consider the rest of the flood story. After all, this passage assumes we know the chapters before this.

The account of the flood begins in chapter 6 of Genesis. I suppose the first thing to note about it is that this really happened. Critics quickly dismiss much of the Bible, especially Genesis and anything miraculous, simply because such stories require God to actually exist, and they don't think he does, so any kind of evidence that points to his existence must be categorically dismissed. They will even point to the ubiquity of flood stories among many

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different civilizations all across the world as evidence that it's *not* true. And some of those stories are more poetic or mythical. So they say that the flood story in Genesis must also be a myth. However, the story in Genesis doesn't read like a myth. It's specific. It has dates, names, dimensions, and various other details. But critics dismiss the account of the flood because it doesn't fit their atheistic view of history, but they're missing the most obvious conclusion. All of these different civilizations have flood stories because it actually happened. If man spread across the world, and then someone made up a flood story, you wouldn't have similar flood stories all across the world. But, if there was a great flood, and humanity was reduced to just eight persons, and then they multiplied and filled the earth, then we would expect a flood story to exist in all these different civilizations.

The flood also helps to make sense of the world and how it came to be the way it is. For example, it explains how we can find fossils of ocean life in the middle of a continent. And the conventional explanation for various geological formations is that erosion caused things to form slowly over a very long period of time. But many things are better explained by a large catastrophic flood forming things very quickly. There's a helpful documentary available on Amazon Prime called *Is Genesis History?* Or you can purchase it other places. A good portion of it is about the flood, and how it actually provides better explanations than conventional atheistic theories. For example, the conventional theory about the Grand Canyon is that the Colorado River slowly carved the canyon, going back and forth and deeper and deeper over a very long period of time. However, that theory doesn't explain how the walls of the canyon show very little sign of erosion or why the walls haven't eventually slid down. They're more like a fresh cutout of the layers of the earth's crust. A more plausible theory is that, when the flood waters receded, there were elevated lakes where the flood water was trapped. And when the wall of one of those lakes gave way, all the water came rushing down and carved out the canyon. I encourage you to watch the documentary. It's very interesting. It doesn't necessarily prove the history of Genesis. Their theories of what, exactly, happened in the flood could be wrong. But just watch it and see if their theories seem more plausible than the old conventional theories. A lot of people don't realize how weak the naturalistic theories of the big bang, evolution, and gradual erosion really are. As we learn more about the natural world, those theories are getting weaker. We're at the point now where we're just being gaslighted by people who insist that things happened that way, because they are unwilling to acknowledge the creator, and they just don't have a better explanation.

But in the account of the flood, we read about an event that took the better part of a year, and it caused significant changes to the earth. Some of it we can only speculate about, but the Bible gives us a few specifics. Water came from above and below. It wasn't just an ordinary rain. Apparently there was a lot of water under the surface of the earth, and "all the fountains of the great deep burst forth" (7:11b). Imagine the geological formations that would occur when these fountains burst forth and then the ground collapses into them. "And the windows of the heavens were opened" (7:11b). It sounds as if there was water suspended above the earth, enough to make it rain for forty days and forty nights. There must have been some environmental changes as a result of the flood. The passage we read in chapter 9 speaks of what seems to be the first rainbow. So something changed. That change could be what caused the dinosaurs to go extinct. And we can see that the lifespan of man dropped significantly. Before the flood we read that men were living for 800 or 900 hundred years (Gen. 5). But that was not good. "The LORD saw that the wickedness of man was great in the earth, and that every intention of the thoughts of his heart was only evil continually" (6:5). And the earth was corrupt in God's sight, and the earth was

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filled with violence (6:11). It was not good for man to live so long. Just before the flood, the LORD said, “My Spirit shall not abide in man forever, for he is flesh: his days shall be 120 years” (6:3). Then, immediately after the flood, we see the lifespan of man drop to 200 years, then to 120, and now we’re down to 80 or 90. It’s really not good for man, spiritually, to live for hundreds of years. Because death would seem so distant and we would have less fear of God. It would make us feel like this life is eternal, when 900 years is really quite short compared to real eternity. So we should learn “to number our days that we may get a heart of wisdom” (Ps. 90:12).

Today, our culture is giving less and less thought to death. The lifespan is ticking back up a little bit. But the bigger thing is that we just remove death from our sight. I was talking to a funeral director recently who said that in mortuary school they talked about this as the “deathless generation.” Many people never see the body after a loved one dies. Some people don’t even have funerals. Some cities don’t have cemeteries anymore. It’s all removing death from our sight. The only places many of us see death is in video games or on TV. But in video games, you shoot people and it doesn’t matter, or you die and you just start over again. And on TV, a disproportionate number of characters who supposedly die reappear, and CPR is way more effective than in real life. Death just doesn’t seem as real as it used to be, and it’s one of the reasons why we are losing the fear of God. We don’t think as often about that day when we will have to give an account (Matt. 12:36). Our civilization is becoming less civilized and more violent all the time. We’re going back to the way it was before the flood.

The big reason, though, why someone might not want to believe the flood story has nothing to do with science. It’s the theology. We don’t want to believe that the heart of man is corrupt, because that means that my heart is corrupt. And we don’t want to believe in a God that would pour out his wrath and destroy all flesh, save eight persons and a few animals. Because if that’s the nature of man, and if that’s the nature of God, then we should be very afraid that he will also destroy us. It’s not just that we don’t want to believe in a judgmental God, but we don’t want to believe in a God who judges us. But whether or not we want to believe it doesn’t affect the veracity of it one bit. So we should accept that our natures are sinful, and we should believe in a God of judgment, simply because these things are true. And accepting the truth is always good.

But then, once we do accept this, we find that this judgmental God is also gracious. And it’s not like his judgment and grace are dueling characteristics within his nature, but his judgment is actually foundational to his grace. It’s not what we expect to find at first, so it surprises us when we find this to be true. The flood was just as much an act of salvation as it was an act of judgment. In chapter 6 we read about the wickedness, evil, corruption, and violence of the earth (6:5, 11). The LORD even regretted that he had made man (6:6). It was terrible. Only Noah found favor in the eyes of the LORD (6:8). We don’t even know if his sons were righteous. So think about this: What would have happened if God had not sent a flood? We don’t know, exactly. Only God knows, so we trust that he knew what he was doing. But the trajectory of mankind was toward complete unbelief, perhaps even extinction because of the pervasive violence. So by destroying all flesh, God was saving Noah, his family, and all of humanity descended from them.

The apostle Peter, in his first letter, compares the flood to Baptism. And the interesting thing is that Peter doesn’t speak of God using the ark to save them. He speaks of the water as the instrument God used to save those eight persons (3:20). God saved humanity by destroying the wicked.

This is the way God typically works. About a thousand years after the flood, the LORD saved the people of Israel from slavery in Egypt by destroying Pharaoh’s army (Ex. 14). At various

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other times, he saved the nations of Israel or Judah by destroying the armies that came against them (e.g., 2 Kings 19). In Old Testament worship, God saved the people by accepting sacrifices of animals in their place. All of this looks forward to our ultimate deliverance in Jesus Christ, when God condemned all sin in the flesh of his Son (Rom. 8:3). God saves us by destroying our enemies. But the sticky thing is that one of our enemies is our own sinful flesh. So the great flood was never going to be a permanent solution. The permanent solution has to be something that destroys our sin without destroying us. And the only way to do that is for God to become one of us, so that he can take our sin into himself, to suffer, and to die with that sin, so that he can make atonement for sin and free us from the bondage it holds us in. God saves us by being destroyed in our place.

Then in Baptism, like he did in the flood, God uses water to unite us to Jesus Christ and drown our sin in his death (Rom. 6:3-5; Col. 2:11-12; 1 Pet. 3:18-22). And, finally, we look forward to the Last Day, when God will melt the earth with fire and recreate it in perfection (2 Pet. 3:11-13).

God has wrath. But it's not an irrational wrath. We experience irrational wrath when we just get so mad that we explode. We are mistaken if we project this irrational kind of wrath onto God. His wrath is always under control. It's reasoned. It's just. And that might be the thing that scares us the most, because we know that we are unjust. But the ultimate purpose of God's wrath is to destroy our enemies and to save us.

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So from the history of the flood, we should learn to fear God. He is still the same God who once destroyed the whole earth, save eight persons and a boatload of animals. He has promised to never again destroy the world with a flood. And we get the impression that God doesn't just promise to withhold a flood, but he will never do a reset like this again. Because he also said to Noah, "While the earth remains, seedtime and harvest, cold and heat, summer and winter, day and night, shall not cease" (8:22). God will not destroy the earth again, not until he destroys it one last time by fire in order to recreate it in perfection. We should not take God's covenant after the flood as a promise that he will do nothing. And we shouldn't want a God that does nothing, because a God that does nothing doesn't save us either. So fear God. If you live your life like men did before the flood, thinking that God will do nothing, neither good nor bad, you should be terrified. You will receive a harsher judgment than the men of the flood received. God will condemn you to the torment of hell forever. You don't want that for you. I don't want that for you. God doesn't want that for you. But if you call upon the Name of Jesus for salvation, you will receive a greater deliverance than Noah received. For God will rescue you from your sin, from the death of this world, and from all the power of hell. And he will bring you into his perfect new creation.

Ultimately, the flood is a story of God's salvation and faithfulness. He rescued Noah, his family, and a boatload of animals. And he made a covenant with Noah and all creation. God cares about everything he made. So it wasn't just a covenant with man. It was a covenant with every living thing. And when God makes covenants, he keeps them. Even when we are faithless, he keeps them. Notice that God didn't give any conditions to this covenant. He did not say, "If you are good, I will never send a flood." No, he just made an absolute promise. He will never again destroy the world with a flood, no matter how much we tempt him.

As a sign, God set his rainbow in the sky. Think about a rainbow. What does it mean? The Hebrew word is exactly the same as for a bow, as in the weapon that shoots arrows. God put his mighty bow in the sky as a sign to us. A bow is a weapon of war, but God's bow is not pointed at

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the earth. We are protected behind God's mighty bow. It's a sign to show us that God is not against us, but for us, and he will use his mighty power to deliver his creation from the forces of evil that come against her. God has always been this way. He has always used his power and wrath in love to defend his creation. In the flood, he saved his creation from the violence and corruption that filled the earth. In Jesus Christ, he delivered us from the power of sin, death, and the devil by destroying and being destroyed for our sake. And he will continue to deliver us by his mighty power until, at last, he brings an end to this world and brings us into his new creation, where we will experience perfect and complete deliverance from all evil. Amen.

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Now may the peace of God, which passes all understanding, guard your hearts and minds in Christ Jesus (Phil. 4:7). Amen.