

May 14, 2006 AM

GOD'S WAR-BOW
GENESIS 9:8-17

1. God's Word To Himself (8:20-22); 2. God's Word Concerning Life (9:1-7);

3. GOD'S WORD CONCERNING ALL FLESH (9:8-17)

A. GOD'S PROMISE OF PRESERVATION (8-11)

Built upon sacrifice: The life promised in the covenant is based upon the sacrifice offered. Life will only come on the other side of death.

I will establish: We have seen this in 6:18. God will establish his covenant with Noah and destroy the world.

(1) The covenant that God makes is sovereignly administered. Noah, as we have seen, responds in faith to God's word and is thus saved from the waters of destruction. The covenant is non-negotiable. God tells man how it will be and man either submits to God in faith or he rebels in unbelief. No matter man's response, God's word is sure.

(2) The covenant that God makes with Noah, his sons and the animals is continuous with God's original purposes in creation and moves history along toward the fulfillment of those promises (cp. 6:18)

God's original plan: that man, God's image-bearer, would rule in the world, developing the world for God's glory, filling the world with life. This was a project that would be completed over time. But sin brought death, distorting God's image in man, bringing death to the world (i.e., instead of life).

Reason for "establishing" the covenant: to complete the work that he originally intended for the world. God is continuing his plan through Noah and his family, the new humanity, the new image-bearers.

The original purposes are there, but they must go through transformation because of sin. While there is continuity between the two covenants, there are also some serious changes being made. The old world has died and must be raised to new life again.

Heirs of the promise: This plan (or covenant)—like it was originally intended—is mediated through humans and includes all of the rest of creation. That is, humans are God's agents who will bring this plan to its consummation. God will act through man to accomplish his purposes. Note the beneficiaries of the covenant in 9:9-10.

Humans: God is speaking to Noah and his sons (9:8), Shem, Ham and Japheth. Previously God spoke to Noah (6:18), now to all. What is going on here? The covenant has a mediator; that is, one through whom God will accomplish his promises. The mediator of the covenant is Noah himself.

But those who are united to the mediator or "in Noah" also become heirs of the covenant (i.e., them and their seed).

What about Ham? Ham and his descendants will eventually become the serpent's seed and the arch-enemies of the people of God. Nevertheless, they do so as they turn their backs upon the promises God made to them, just like Adam did in the beginning.

God is making a covenant with all of humanity, or, as we might say later, all of the nations. We will see in chapter 10 what is called the "table of nations." All of these nations come from these three sons of Noah. This covenant that God makes with Noah becomes the foundation for the promises made to Abraham: through him *all the families/nations of the earth will be blessed*.

This does not mean that every person, head-for-head, will be saved. Those who do not respond to the promises of God given in his gospel will be cast out of the earth and into hell. But their unfaithfulness does not nullify the faithfulness of God. God will have a world the way he intended it ... with or without certain people.

The animals: This is a renewal of the covenant. So, God had a covenant with the animals *before* this time (cf. 8:1).

The animals will also participate in God's glorious redemption of the world. Cf. e.g., Isa 11:1ff.

"all flesh"- vv. 11, 17 - reversal of what was happening before the flood. The phrase "all flesh" is used in a number of places as God declares his destructive judgment upon the earth (cp. 6:12, 13, 17, 19).

The content of the promise: God will not "cut off" all flesh by the waters of the flood. God's promise to preserve the earth in order

that it might move to its consummation.

“Cut off” - commonly used in covenant making ceremonies. In fact, covenants are not “made” but “cut” according to biblical language. This is the language of death. When God “cut off” all flesh by the flood, he was putting them to death (cf. circumcision).

B. GOD SIGNIFIES HIS COVENANT (12-16)

Signs and covenants: “Why is there a need for a ‘sign’ of the covenant?” (1) God has chosen to carry out his covenant purposes through these signs. (2) These are the means by which God works his covenant purposes. As we will see, the sign of the covenant—the bow in the clouds—becomes the effective sign by which God remembers his covenant and chooses not to destroy the earth again. God accomplishes his purposes by the use of these signs.

A new sign: God took what was already there and gave it new significance. In other words, he transformed something from the old world. A couple of reasons for this:

(1) The nature of the bow in the clouds as a war-bow. The word translated “bow” in our text is used almost without variation in the OT to refer to an instrument of war. It is that instrument used to shoot arrows (cf. e.g., Psa 7:12; Hab 3:9f.). What God did in the flood was declare war upon the earth.

(2) Another reason would be the whole pattern of taking up the old world and transforming it into something new in the new world.

A pattern in Scripture: While a particular sign or thing exists at an earlier stage of redemptive history, when a new era begins, that thing is taken up, transformed and given new significance in the new era (note e.g., the Sabbath, cp. Ex 16 and 31:16-17; also note the Lord’s Supper).

The perpetuity of God’s covenant: “an everlasting covenant,” vv. 12, 16. (Several other e.g., Gen 17:7, 13, 19; Lev 24:8; Num 25:13; 2 Sam 23:5; Isa 24:5; 55:3)

The covenant that God makes looks for fulfillment. Being an everlasting covenant strongly implies the continuity of God’s plan. This does not discount any “newness” that will come. The newness of the covenant is only one more stage in God’s fulfilling of his everlasting covenant. Cf. Heb 13:20

God’s remembrance: Origin of the war-bow: in heaven itself (cf. Ezek 1:28; Rev 4:3; also Rev 10:1). God says that he will set his bow in the cloud, and when he brings a cloud over the earth, he will see the bow. The clouds (like that on Mt. Sinai and in the Tabernacle) are manifestations of God’s glory. They are places where his throne abides. Thus, the rainbow is in the clouds.

And though we are able to see the rainbow, this is not the most important point. The bow in the clouds is primarily for God to see. And this is what is emphasized in the text. God causes a cloud to pass in the sky and he sees the bow in the cloud. When God sees the bow in the cloud he remembers his covenant, and in response he refuses to destroy the earth again by a flood of waters. God fulfills his covenant by use of the sign of the covenant.

C. GOD SUMMARIZES HIS COVENANT (17)

Clarify: the covenant with Noah, his sons and the animals are part of God’s saving purposes for the world. There is the tendency by some to consider the Noachic covenant as something distinct from God’s covenant by which he is bringing about the redemption he promised in, for instance, Gen 3:15.

The Noachic covenant has to do with the salvation of the entire cosmos. We must think this way lest we begin to think that there is a covenant in the Bible whose promises do not find their yes and Amen in Christ. That would fly in the face of Scripture interpreting Scripture. It is in this way that Christ is Savior of the world but not in some universalistic sense; i.e., head-for-head every individual will be saved. When a man refuses to give thanks for the rain, sun, food, lack of judgment, etc. that was promised in the Noachic covenant, he is refusing Christ, not some contract of common grace outside of Christ.

Application: (1) God is sovereignly taking the world to its intended goal.

(2) God remembers his covenant.