

Verses 8-11

Then spoke to Noah and his sons with him, saying, “Look, I myself am establishing a covenant with you with your descendants coming after you and with every living creature, the birds, the cattle, with every living animal of the earth with you, with everything coming out of the ark through to all the living creatures of the earth. I am establishing my covenant with you. I will not cut off again all flesh by [the waters] of a flood and there will never be again a flood to destroy the earth.

God addresses the males of the family, perhaps reflecting the priority men had in the hearing and learning of God's word and the leadership they enjoyed in the life of worship. What the Lord says is always for the whole community, never-the-less.

הנני **'behold'** in verse 9 is like the 'truly, truly' that the Lord Jesus used. It precedes, not so much a revelation of truth, but a revelation of action, something that Noah and the rest of human kind can see and experience.

God makes a promise, **'I will establish my covenant'**. בריתי I won't elucidate the various meanings of the term covenant, but note that this covenant is God's covenant. He is the Lord of heaven and earth and only he has the grace and the authority to initiate a new order in the world. It is clearly, then, an unconditional covenant rather than an agreement between two parties. God does the giving here.

Of course others are involved, but they are the recipients of God's grace, his gift of life that he is about to explain in further detail. It might seem that only Noah's family and family descendants are included, but in the event of the flood, it was thought that all human life was annihilated except for Noah and his family. Therefore, the covenant is for all human beings.

Then in verse 10, God extends the covenant to living things kept safe in the ark, **'the flying creatures, the domesticated animals, and all living creatures of the earth.'** **'The living creatures of the earth'** הארץ חיה ובכל. This probably refers to the wild creatures of the earth, somehow transported in the ark, but after release, roaming the earth. No mention is made of the plants but one assumes that vegetation would arise and prosper by other means at God's disposal. The focus of the covenant is, therefore, on the respiring forms of life. In Genesis 1:22 and 28 God blesses the living creatures of the sea and of the air as well as human beings. Though it may seem the covenant is exclusively land-based, it can be assumed that all air and water breathing animals dependent on the earth and its vegetation are what God wishes to bless. **Flying things** are included but not fish. Thus, in chapter 9, God has a mind for the brain-based forms of life, and by extension, it is assumed that vegetation and other forms of life necessary for them are included in a defacto way.

God loves all of his creation and particularly cares for animals and fish that are so dependent on the ecosystem and vulnerable to extinction. It is probably why the phrase is repeated in verse 10. God's thoughts are not only for human life but all living creatures.

Our Lord Jesus didn't speak of creation except in parables to explain the kingdom of God. However, in saying, 'love your neighbour as yourself', we now realize that this has to include loving the environment that sustains our neighbour. Luther's understanding of the seventh commandment, 'to protect the neighbour's property and means of making a living', would have to take the economy derived from the world and its animal, plant and mineral resources into consideration.

God's covenant includes a negative clause: it excludes things that might repeat the devastation that had occurred through the flood. Thus he promises, **'I will not cut off all flesh again in the waters of the flood and there will not be a flood again to destroy the earth.'** No doubt disasters will continue yet the Lord encourages Noah, his family and subsequent generations, to trust in his word and be strong in the knowledge that a limitation has been placed on the disaster any natural event can bring. Excluded here are events caused by human beings, such as global warming. The impact of sea levels is not a result of God's activity. Since the majority of the earth

is covered in water, the flood מַבּוּל is probably the most destructive and with our understanding of climate change and global warming, rising sea levels and wilder storms bringing inundation are particularly worrisome.

The promise of 8:21,22 is now sealed in a covenant, guaranteeing the preserving and sustaining work of the Lord. This related text reminds us, too, that though this covenant reveals God's preserving work in creation, it has much to do with his desire to redeem humankind. Life is under a curse but God limits this curse for the sake of his love for human life and all life on earth. The covenant is a precursor to the forgiveness and the justified status we shall enjoy under the new covenant of Christ's body and blood, what he called 'the new testament in my blood.'

Verses 12-17

God said, "This will be the sign of the covenant I am giving between me and you and between all living flesh that is with you to generations forever. I am putting my rainbow in the clouds and it will be a sign of the covenant between me and between the earth. It will come about when I bring a lot of cloud over the earth and the rainbow will be seen in the cloud. I will remember my covenant, which is between me and you and between all living flesh. There will never be again waters for such a flood to destroy every animal. I will see the rainbow in the cloud and remember the everlasting covenant between God and between all living things, for all creatures upon the earth." And God said to Noah, "This is the sign of the covenant that I have established between me and you and between all flesh that is on the earth."

Now appears the formal wording of the covenant. The covenant comes with a 'sign' אֵימָנָה, like the sign of circumcision in the covenant with Abraham and his male descendants. A sign is the concrete outward form that 'declares' the word of God. Thus the 'rainbow' הַקֶּשֶׁת is a visual phenomenon but with an auditory message. It is not a pretty thing or a physical process only. God calls it 'my rainbow' in verse 13. All that God makes is his but the rainbow that has always existed where rain and sun have been, now has a new function under God's direction: it must perform as a sign, a messenger from God revealing the covenant.

In verse 12 we note that God is 'giving' this sign as he also gives the covenant. We can look up at God's gifts and see signs of them in the sky. His word is tangible, as is the gift of Christ in the bread and wine of the Lord's Supper and waters of baptism. In the sacraments, the marks or signs indicate the purpose of the gospel, to wash/forgive and to feed/grant spiritual life.

In the same verse, God assures us that his covenant will last while human beings exist. Doom and gloom forecasts of life on this planet issued by man do not compare to the enduring promises of God. His word is eternal and therefore his gifts are 'everlasting' עוֹלָם, that is, while the universe continues to exist. We can be assured then that God has placed some correcting mechanism into the earth's system to ensure a balance; they will always pull the earth back from the edge of oblivion. It might mean great hardship for life on earth but life will always be there and always recover. Of course, to deliberately burden this earth when we know better is to attack God and hate our neighbour and such actions will bring suffering upon us.

Verse 13 stresses once again that the covenant is between God and the 'earth' and therefore encompasses all life and all inanimate forms. As I said above, human and animal life cannot exist without soil, rock and tree.

In verse 15, God says, 'I will remember my covenant'. This seems strange to our ears. It says that God needs the sign as we do, that it is like a reminder note for a busy person. In verse 16, God explains that he will 'see the rainbow and be reminded'. Could God forget? Obviously not. Though in an anthropomorphic way of speaking, what God is telling us is that the covenant places him under an obligation and the sign of the rainbow constrains him to act in favour of the world. In short, God has to stick to his word and cannot forget it or abrogate it. How unlike the Allah of Islam that cannot be tied to this earth or to humankind because he is absolute and his will cannot be influenced by anything happening on this earth. Whereas, the true God, especially revealed through our Lord Jesus, is one who feels for his earth, who has a heart and is burdened by our needs and therefore must act on our behalf.

God proclaims to all life, in verse 15, that he will act in mercy and forgive the enemy status of humankind. Though our sins are intolerable to the Lord he is held back by a much greater feeling of love, gratuitous, bounteous, infinite love that will continue to grant life on this planet until world's end.

Verses 16 and 17 repeat what has been already said. I might add that God's mercy overrides his judgement while he sustains this earth. However, the prophets speak of the end of the universe on the great 'day of the Lord'. Forgiveness and God's toleration of human rebellion do not proceed from a weakness in God, that he will overlook sin. In Romans Paul makes clear that this has not been the case (3:25). In his Son, God suffers all our sin and makes it his own so that the consequences of God's wrath do not need to be suffered by us. The full burden of this world, its afflictions and so on, have been borne by our Lord Jesus. For those who do not see in Christ, this new ark, and the realization of what the rainbow has pointed to, will face a torment of cosmic proportions without the saving intervention of our Lord Jesus Christ.