

Genesis 8-9 Leaving the Ark

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Overview

Chiastic with the first half. Distribute handout; review overall structure.

8:1, Center

“God remembered Noah... .” Not a casual, passive response, as though God were liable to a “senior moment.”

- It is *deliberate*. To see this, consider how the verb is used of people:
 - They can be commanded to remember (and mostly, God is the object): Eccl 12:1; Isa 46:8 (bring to mind); Deut 32:7.
 - They can be condemned for not remembering. Ezek 16:22, 43
- It is *personal*. What God remembers is mostly people or events associated with people (e.g., their sin, their misfortune). (And what people mostly remember or forget is God.)
- It is *active*. Always associated with action.
 - Here, he remembers and withdraws the waters.
 - 19:29, he remembers Abraham and thus delivers Lot from the cities of the plain before the judgment.
 - 30:22, he remembers Rachel and gives her a child.
 - When he remembers sin, it is to punish it, Jer 14:10.

We tend to think of forgetting as accidental, outside of our control. And it may be, in cases of dementia. But with healthy people, if you really care about something and focus your attention on it, you don't forget it. Isa 49:15, “Can a woman forget her sucking child?” “I forgot” is less an excuse than a confession that “I didn't care.” Conversely, if something is really important to you, you remember it. Thus Moses uses the word to remind us how precious Noah and his cargo are to God. The Lord has had his eye on them the whole time.

Broader applications of this idea:

1. when the thief on the cross asks the Lord to “remember him” (Luke 23:42), it is a request not just for a kind thought but for action.
2. It is a great blessing when God does *not* remember our sins, for that means that he will *not* take the action of punishing them; Jer 31:34.
3. This perspective places our remembrance of the Lord (1 Cor 11:24,25) in a new light. It is something we must do deliberately, with practical consequences in our lives.

Here, the significance is that this is indisputably the center of a very rich chiastic structure. The history of the flood is as much a story of God's mercy on Noah as it is of his wrath on sinful people. We must proclaim God's wrath against sin and warn people of his judgment. But we

must never become discouraged or fear that he will visit that wrath on us. God remembered Noah, and he will remember us.

1b-5, Waters Withdraw, cf. 7:17-24

This corresponds to the mounting of the waters in 7:17-24. That section had two parts:

- the waters themselves (17-20, 24)
- their effect, culminating in the death of all flesh (21-23)

Here in reverse order, Moses addresses these:

- God drives the waters back with a wind. The Hebrew word is the same as “spirit,” as in 1:2, and one of the words used at the pinnacle of 7:21-23 (22, “breath of the spirit of life”) to emphasize the coming of death.
 - We are reminded that the world has returned to its primitive state of sterile death, and now as then the lifegiving Spirit of God offers the promise of better things to come.
 - Compare the role of the wind/spirit in driving back the waters at the Red Sea (Exod 14:21, where it is clearly the wind)
- Then we are told that the waters withdraw, using five different words:
 - “aswaged,” *\$akak*, used of wrath in Est 2:1; 7:10; compare this with the anthropomorphism in “prevailed” in 7:17-24.
 - “stopped,” *sakar*
 - “restrained” *kala’*
 - “returned” *\$ub*
 - “abated, decreased” *xaser*

6, Noah Opens the Window, cf. 7:16b

There, the Lord sealed them into the ark after they entered in; here, Noah opens the window to send out the birds.

The 40 days recalls the 40 days of the rising waters in 7:17, which initiated the 150 days before the ark grounded. So we have a little chiasm emerging in the dates:

- 40 days of rising water after the door is sealed
- 150 – 50 = 110 days of sailing until the ark grounds
- 40 days of declining water before Noah opens the window.

This pattern will continue as we proceed.

7-14, Sending of the Birds, cf. 7:7-16a.

There, the order of entering the Ark is first Noah and his family, then the animals. (They went in “unto Noah,” 7:9,15). Conversely, the first to leave are the animals, or at least the birds.

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The section is structured around 7 day periods.

- Two are explicit: 10, 12.
- But the first of these is already “other seven days,” presuming that he had waited already seven days after sending out the raven before sending the dove.

Thus we extend the chiastic structure of dates seen earlier:

- 7 days to bring the animals into the ark
- 40 days of rising water after the door is sealed
- 150 – 50 = 110 days of sailing until the ark grounds
- 40 days of declining water before Noah opens the window.
- 3x7 days to send the animals out of the ark

The *raven* went forth “to and fro,” lit. “going and returning.” We are to picture this noisy bird flying away from the ark, then returning to rest, then going out again, repeatedly until the ground is dry. The sound of its cawing is a reminder to the inhabitants that the earth is not yet hospitable enough for even an unclean carrion eater.

Noah shows more care for the *dove*. It is sent out “from him,” v.8, and he gently takes it unto him when it returns, v.9. Over the course of three weeks it shows him the abatement of the waters:

1. Returns with nothing, v.9. Doves are not long-distance flyers. With no rest for the sole of her foot, she could not have stayed out long.
2. Returns at evening with an olive branch, v. 11.
 - a. “At evening” means she was able to rest occasionally.
 - b. Olives do not grow high up on the mountains, but rather in the valleys. Shows how far the waters have receded.
 - c. “plucked off” = “fresh.” The tree is able to give off new leaves.
3. Does not return, v. 12.

Finally, in vv. 13-14, Noah is confident enough to remove the “covering” of the ark, probably opening up the roof to enable a broader look around and admit more light and fresh air. The drying of the land is depicted in two stages:

- First “the face of the ground is dry,” without standing water, but still swampy and muddy.
- 57 days later, “the earth was dry,” firm enough to support traffic.

Throughout this section, note how Noah explores the state of the world. Cf. Acts 16:7-10; Isa 30:21.

1. He does not wait passively for God to tell him what to do next, but takes reasonable initiative and action to discern the Lord’s will. He knows that the Lord has put him on the ark to save him. Now the flood seems to be over. He is eager to move on with the life for which God has preserved him, and takes steps to explore and learn from the world itself what God’s will might be.

2. He is not brash about his salvation, or eager to rush out and take over the world of which God's judgment has made him sole proprietor. Rather, humbled by the intensity of God's judgment, he gingerly explores, first limiting himself to what he can learn through the window by the actions of birds, and even after removing the roof, waiting until he has explicit permission from God to go forth.

15-17, Divine Command, cf. 7:1-3

Note from the chart how closely this command (to leave the ark) parallels the earlier one (to enter it). But why the shift from "the Lord" in 7:1 to "God" in 8:15? Possible answer: "God" is the generic name for the deity, while "Lord" emphasizes his relation to his chosen people. In 7:1, God is selecting Noah from the rest of the world's population, and preserving him alone, thus the covenant name is used. In 8:15, he is sending Noah out as the progenitor of the entire population of the new world, thus the more generic term. We will see a comparable contrast in usage in 6:12 and 8:21, another pair of verses that correspond structurally.

18-19, Noah's Obedience, cf. 6:22

The succinct notice of Noah's obedience in leaving the ark is chiasmatically aligned with the notice of his obedience in building it. Throughout the episode, he is marked as a man of obedience.

8:20-9:17, Divine Observations, Promise, and Commands, cf. 6:11-21

These two panels have three corresponding members: the state of the population, divine observations, and divine promise mixed with commands.

8:20, Moral State of the Population, cf. 6:11

Noah's offering consists of clean animals, in contrast with the corrupt behavior of the antediluvians. "Corrupt" is the word used for Jeremiah's belt after being buried in mud for many days (Jer 13:7): "rotten, filthy." The antediluvians slaughtered each other in contempt of God's will, and ignored him. Noah slaughters animals as a act of sacrifice and worship to God, and at great potential cost to himself, since there are very few of each one available.

Application: The contrast in these verses reminds us of the importance of worship in avoiding the pollutions of the world. Worldlings have their focus on each other, and get caught up either in ungodly lust or in wicked hatred and strife. Our focus is to be on our God, trusting him for our needs and offering him all we are and have.

The episode points up Noah's priorities in two ways.

Building an Altar.—This is the first reference in the Bible to "building an altar," an activity that preoccupies godly men in every age of the OT, down through Jeshua the son of Jozadak the high priest (Ezra 3:2) upon the return of the Babylonian exiles to Jerusalem. We can imagine that Cain and Abel in Gen 4 had altars, but this is the first explicit mention of constructing one.

In Genesis, building an altar marks the travels of Abraham (12:7 in Shechem, 8 in Bethel; 13:18 in Hebron; 22:9 on Mt. Moreh to offer Isaac), Isaac (26:25 in Beersheba), Jacob (35:7 in Bethel). In every case, it is the first thing the builder constructs when he arrives at a place. In fact, Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob lived in tents, so it was the only sort of permanent structure they

constructed. So for Noah, newly landed on an earth destitute of civilization, the first structure he feels a need to construct is an altar for worship. He doesn't start with a house, or a barn, or a bridge over a nearby stream. Of all the many things to which he might have devoted his effort, he starts with an altar.

Application: What is your first priority in moving to a new location? It ought to be identifying the believers and getting to know them, so that you can join them in worship. Whatever the reason for your move, you should make your spiritual home your priority.

Extent of the Offerings.—Note the extravagance of Noah's offering: he offered "of every clean beast, and of every clean fowl." One might expect he would offer a sheep one day, a dove the next, and a goat the third, for example, stretching out his supplies. But he offers up representatives of every kind that he had brought aboard, severely depleting his resources.

Application: It has become unfashionable to inconvenience ourselves in worshipping God. Churches seek to schedule their services so that people don't have to give up their weekend time. We hire professionals so that people don't have to invest their own effort in Bible study to have something to share with their brothers and sisters. We are less and less interested in sacrificing *anything* in our worship. But sacrifice is of the essence of worship: see David's spirit in 2 Sam 24:18-24, "neither will I offer burnt offerings unto the LORD my God of that which doth cost me nothing."

8:21-22, Divine Observations, cf. 6:12

Here we are told not only that God observes the sacrifice, but also that he forms a resolve in consequence of it.

21a, The Observation

In both cases, we are told that God observes the human conduct, whether corrupt and displeasing (6:12) or honoring to him (8:21-22).

"The Lord smelled a sweet savour." Two details invite our attention: the metaphor of God's "smelling," and the notion of a "sweet savour." Both are recurrent OT concepts, introduced here for the first time.

"The Lord Smelled..."

We ought not to think of God as wandering by, noticing the aroma of the barbeque, and stopping in for bite. The Babylonians did think this way. The gods send the flood to get rid of the noisy humans who are disturbing their sleep, but unfortunately forget that without humans to offer sacrifice, they will starve. After the flood, Utnapishtim, the Babylonian Noah, recounts his experience:

I ... offered a sacrifice.
I poured out a libation on the top of the mountain. ...
The gods smelled the savor,
The gods smelled the sweet savor,
The gods crowded like flies about the sacrificer. (ANET p. 95)

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We must understand that the Lord's reaction is not at this level. To see this, compare the use of the verb "smell" elsewhere.

- "Smell" has the metaphorical sense here of "accept," which is how it is translated in 1 Sam. 26:19. Note also the synonyms "accept" and "regard" in Amos 5:21,22.
- It is active on God's part, not passive, as the refusal to smell in Amos 5:21; Lev. 26:31 shows. "The Lord savored the restful aroma."

Note the change in divine name.

- When Moses speaks of God's displeasure with the entire race, he describes him as "God," 6:12.
- When the emphasis is on God's pleasure with Noah's obedience, he describes him as "Lord," 8:21.

Application: Unbelievers sometimes portray God as an ogre who is maliciously trying to catch men in wrong-doing. Rather, he is an omniscient being who observes all that we do, and delights in our obedience as much as he is offended by our rebellion. We can take comfort in the knowledge that nothing we undertake for him will be left unnoticed.

"...a sweet savour"

The "sweet savour" is a common characteristic of the levitical sacrifices (Lev. 1:9; 2:2). It is never used (with the exception of 4:31, for which see notes in vocabulary file) of sin or trespass offerings, only of whole burnt offerings or peace offerings. Thus it reflects the aspect of sacrifice that focuses on worship of a redeemed people, not of the process of redemption in the first place. The notion of a "sweet savour" comes into the NT in three passages that use this same term. These show us first the *origin* of our sweet savour offering to God, then the *means* by which we can join Noah in such offerings.

Eph. 5:2, "Walk in love, as Christ also hath loved us, and hath given himself for us an offering and a sacrifice to God for a sweetsmelling savour."

Recall that Christ's offering has two aspects, reflected in the elements at the table:

- His blood corresponds to the sin offering, and is redemptive in character, paying for our sins. In itself, this only makes us neutral.
- His body corresponds to the whole burnt offering, and represents his own righteousness, imputed to us. This is in focus here in Eph 5, with the emphasis on the "sweet savour."

This passage reminds us that our conduct toward others is to be patterned on Christ's example of offering himself as a "sweet savour" to God. The other two NT passages show two ways in which we do this.

2 Cor 2:15, "For we are unto God a sweet savour of Christ, in them that are saved, and in them that perish." Note three qualifications: "unto God," "of Christ," "in them..."

- We are a sweet savour "unto God," offering a sacrifice that pleases him.
- This savour is "of Christ," resulting from his sacrifice, his obedience, his merit.

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- It is emitted “in them” to whom we speak; by means of our proclamation of the gospel. Whether people accept it or reject it, it is a sweet savour to God.

This is a powerful notion—that our witness to unbelievers is at the same time an act of worship to God. But we shall see it again. Note Gen 12:8, where Abraham’s construction of an altar is associated with “making proclamation in the name of the Lord” (recall discussion in 4:26). Acknowledging God before our associates is glorifying to him, and an act of worship. Conversely, unbelievers, observing our worship, can be brought to know the Lord, 1 Cor 14:24-25.

Phil 4:18, “But I have all, and abound: I am full, having received of Epaphroditus the things [which were sent] from you, an odour of a sweet smell, a sacrifice acceptable, wellpleasing to God.” Not only our witness to unbelievers, but also our service to believers, is an act of worship to God.

Summary: The fundamental activity of our life is to worship God. Everything else we do, including witness to unbelievers and service to believers, is done first of all not for the sake of those with whom we are engaged, but as a sweet savour, an offering to God.

21b-22, *The Resolve*

Our text goes on to relate the Lord’s resolve of no further flood. This resolve corresponds to the divine “said in his heart” of 6:3,7. It isn’t a promise yet, just a divine resolve that issues forth in the promise of 9:1-17. On the other side of the chiasm, we already had the divine observation and resolve in 6:1-8, and 6:12 simply recalled it.

Three items in this resolve:

Curse Not Enhanced

“I will not again curse the ground any more” is a subtly different construction from “neither will I again smite any more every thing living.” This one promises that God will never again add to the existing curse on the ground, as he did in the Flood. The earth will remain under the same curse as with Adam. The other promises not to repeat the judgment on every living thing.

“For the imagination”.—A very similar expression to that in 6:5. But in 6:5, this condition was a reason for bringing the flood; here, it is a reason *not* to bring a flood. How can we reconcile these?

Other possible explanations, not used here:

1. *Adversative ki, cf. Ezek 2:6 (but this would be very strange, with the close similarity of 6:5).*
2. *Cassuto: the clause modifies “curse,” and the whole is negated. “I will never again, for the cause of man’s persistent sin, increase the curse on the ground.” But he himself recognizes this as clumsy.*
3. *Keil: focuses on the contrast between “only evil continually” in 6:5 and “from his youth” here. The temporal extent of man’s sinful condition requires that God be merciful, if he is to have men on earth at all.*

At one level, the contrast runs smack up against a fundamental tension in God’s character, that he is both just and the justifier (Rom 3:26). His justice means that sin must result in judgment

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(6:5), while his nature as justifier means that sin must lead to mercy (8:21). But we still must ask: what makes the difference? What determines whether human sin is the cause of judgment or of mercy?

We can identify two actions, one on God's part and the other on man's, that make the difference. One is God's elective and redemptive work; the other is man's intercession. Then we turn to a NT passage that helps interpret this one.

God's Redemptive Work

God's redemptive work is seen in the softening of the criticism here compared with 6:5. Compare this verse, "the imagination of man's heart [is] evil from his youth", with 6:5, "Every imagination of the thoughts of his heart [was] only evil continually." There, but not here, each term is made exhaustive and universal. So it's not exactly the same offense that's in view.

- "Every imagination" becomes "the imagination." Noah's sacrifice shows that under the influence of divine grace, some of man's thoughts are not evil.
- "Only evil" becomes "evil." Noah's sacrifice clearly reveals good thoughts.
- "Continually" becomes "from his youth." The emphasis is no longer on the uninterrupted nature of the corruption, but on its antiquity. Noah, like the rest, was "estranged from the womb," Ps 58:3. But there were times when his imagination was not corrupt.

Note that 6:5 comes *before* the statement in 6:8 that "Noah found grace in the eyes of the Lord," while 8:21 comes *after*. The overall sequence is

- God declares the complete and utter depravity of the race, 6:5, and resolves to destroy them as a result.
- God makes Noah the unmerited recipient of his favor, 6:8.
- Noah demonstrates the redemptive effect of God's grace in his obedience throughout the flood story, culminating in his sacrifice in 8:20.
- God promises to have mercy on sinful man, 8:21.

So what is it that spares the race from a repetition of the judgment of the flood? Only God's purpose to bestow his free grace on his chosen ones.

Man's Intercession

Wenham (after Moberly) compares Exod 33:3; 34:9, where again a statement of human sin is a motive first for judgment, then for mercy. In both cases, the difference turns on intercession, here by Noah, there by Moses.

The presence of the intercessor is critical.

- Amos 7:1-6, where the justification for staying the punishment is not that the people are in fact innocent, but that they are incapable of bearing the proposed judgment. Cf. Jer 42:2.
- Isa 54:9 following the intercession of 53:12! Here the prophet seems to allude to the very point we are discussing, in using the "waters of Noah" as an example of the Lord's free and unconditional mercy on his people *in spite of* their propensity to sin.

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The Scriptures are replete with examples of the importance of the righteous in delivering the world from judgment.

- Gen 18:32, Abraham interceding with God and securing assurance that if 10 righteous people can be found in Sodom, it will be spared.
- Psa 106:23, Moses critical to sparing Israel
- Jer 5:1, God will spare Jerusalem if there is one person who executes judgment and seeks truth.
- Ezek 22:30, God sought for a man to make up the hedge and stand in the gap.
- Isa 59:16 is the capstone: because God could find no man to be the intercessor, therefore he himself came in that capacity.

A NT Interpretation

2 Pet 3:5-9 seems to have just this sequence of thought in mind. Consider:

- V.5 takes us back to the creation of the world by the word of God.
- V.6 reminds us that God destroyed that world through water, thus bringing us to the flood story.
- V.7 then claims that the heavens and earth are “kept in store” by the same word. This is God’s promise not to overflow the world again with water. But Peter now reveals that this promise does not convey immunity from all judgment. The preservation from water simply holds the earth in reserve for a future judgment by fire, to be visited on “ungodly men,” the scoffers of vv. 3-5, always referred to in the third person, “they.”
- Vv. 8-9 describe why God has thus kept the world in store thus long, why he has withheld another judgment of water. It is because he is “longsuffering to us-ward.” The first person is in deliberate contrast with the third person references to the scoffers and ungodly men. God withholds judgment from the world because its population includes his elect. By his gracious work, their lives demonstrate that sin no longer dominates. They still have evil thoughts, but they also have good ones. Though sinful “from their youth,” their sin is not continual.

Universal Destruction Precluded

Here the focus moves from the earth to its inhabitants. Given what we have seen about redemption and intercession, the key to this promise is that God will always have a remnant.

Regular Seasons Promised

The resolve in v.22 has two aspects.

1. The regular seasons, which had been interrupted by the flood, will now continue unabated. The rhythm of life is here founded on divine promise.
2. However, this resolve is only good “while the earth remaineth.” The expression, lit. “all the days of the earth,” is used elsewhere in Gen. only of human life (Adam in 3:17; Noah in 9:29). Moses is here capturing the notion that the earth, like a person, has a finite

lifespan. This brings us back to 2 Peter 3. Even in promising preservation, the Lord has a further judgment in mind, the one that will end this present world and usher in the new heavens and the new earth, wherein dwelleth righteousness (2 Pet 3:13).

9:1-17, Divine Promise and Commands, cf. 6:13-21

Once again, we have a mixture of promise and commands. In ch. 6 they alternated twice, but this time they appear only once each, and with the command first rather than the promise (thus reinforcing the chiasmic structure in the order of the topics).

Structural note: the division between the two categories is marked by

- the repetition of the identification of the speaker in 9:1,8
- the emphatic identification of the performers in the two sections, “and you” in 7, “and I” in 8.

9:1-7, Commands

Three themes, the first two forming an inclusio about the other two, which overlap. The whole recalls the blessing on Adam in Gen 1, and in fact this is the “establishment” (6:18) of that covenant with Noah.

1,7, Command to Multiply

Like a new Adam (1:28a), he is to fill the earth with offspring.

2-4, Dominion over Animals

v.2 echoes 1:28b, but the sequel goes much farther. In ch. 1, man was given dominion over the animals, but his food was restricted to plants. Now his dominion over the animals is extended to include eating them. Three stages:

v.2b, “into your hand are they delivered.” This idiom means that they come under his complete control, including the power of life and death. Cf. Deut. 19:12; 20:13; and often.

v.3 makes it clear that this power of life and death includes the power to eat them. It is not just the right of self-defense.

v.4 makes an important exception, anticipating the theme of the next few verses. They are not to eat the blood. Note that this is one of the four “Jewish” commands explicitly enjoined on the Gentile believers in Acts 15:29. In fact, it probably lies behind two of them: explicit eating of blood, and eating of strangled things, which would not have been properly drained of blood.

This verse shows that the prohibition of blood is not strictly Jewish, but goes back to Noah. Arguably, the exhortations against fornication and meat offered to idols are equally general. We should observe these restrictions today.

Understanding the prohibition of eating blood:

- In a special sense, the blood belongs to the Lord. Cf. Lev 3:12-17. Like the fat, it is not to be enjoyed by the offerer, but must be disposed of according to the sacrificial restrictions. In fact, Lev 17:3 required that during the wilderness wandering, every slaughter take

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place at the tabernacle, virtually a peace offering. This requirement is relaxed in Deut 12:20 to provide for their distributed settlement throughout the land, but another is imposed in its place: the blood is to be poured out on the ground as water, Deut 12:16,24, etc.

- Meaning:
 - Recall that the central condemnation of mankind before the flood was for “violence.” Even in eating animals, man must restrain his violence.
 - Lev 17:11 goes further: the blood is reserved as a mechanism for atonement. Only bloody sacrifices could deal with sin, because they show the pouring out of life that God requires as punishment for sin.
- In light of this, consider how remarkable it is that at the Lord’s Table, we are invited to eat the flesh and drink the blood of the sacrifice! We can now enter much more fully into fellowship with the Lord, partaking of his life, no longer an atonement but now the source of our life.

4-6, Sanctity of Blood.

Respect for animal blood serves in turn as a reminder of the sanctity of human life. Because man is God’s image, God’s representative, slaying him is disrespectful of the sovereign Lord who has placed him there, and will be avenged by the shedding of the blood of the slayer.

This might be a good time to review the biblical teaching on capital punishment.

Capital *offenses* include

- murder (here)
- idolatry (Deut 13:10; 17:2-5))
- disrespect for authority (e.g., parents) (Deut 21:18-21; cf. 2 Kings 21:10))
- sexual impurity (Num 5:21; Deut 22:21-24)

Modes of *punishment* include

- stoning by the congregation (for idolatry, disrespect, impurity—*not* murder!)
- death at the hand of the avenger of blood (Num 35; Deut 19) (for murder) (note the similarity of Gen 9:6 with Matt 26:52; Rev 13:10. Defines the result but not the mechanism)
- death at the hand of the Lord (Num 5:21; cf. the expression “cut off from among his people” throughout the law)

Caveat: required *evidence*: two or three witnesses: Deut 17:6; 19:5.

9:8-17, Promises

There are three sections to this promise, each introduced with “and God said” (“spake” in v.8 is an unjustified deviation from 12 and 17). The first section deals with the confirmation of the

covenant, the second with the institution of the sign of the covenant, and the third is a summary of these two.

8-11, Confirming the Covenant

The verb.—“Establish,” not “make” (lit. “cut”). This idiom refers to the renewal of a previously existing covenant with a new party, compare the renewal of the Abrahamic covenant with his offspring in 17:7, 19, 21. As we discussed under 6:18, the reference is most likely to Gen 1:28-30, which are so closely echoed in 9:1-7. God is here reminding Noah that the privileges and responsibilities he has just been given are not arbitrary, but part of a covenant relationship in which Noah is a party.

Application: To recognize this linkage, it is probably best not to talk about a “Noahic covenant.” God does make new covenants (e.g., with Abraham, or at Sinai, or with David, or the great New Covenant), but this is not one of them.

The participants.—God explicitly includes the animals in this covenant. Implicitly, they were part of the earlier covenant as well, because of the command to be fruitful and multiply.

Application: Here is another foundation for a truly Christian environmentalism. The animals participate in the covenant of creation with us. While we have dominion over them, it is within the constraints of that covenant, and we are not free to do with them as we will. Note the later commands in the law about dealing humanely with one’s farm animals.

The extension.—While this is a renewal of the covenant of creation and not a new covenant, God does extend it to rule out a subsequent flood. As we saw in 8:21, this extension is coupled with the presence of a faithful interceding people, and holds the world in reserve for a future, yet greater, judgment by fire.

12-16, Setting the Sign

Probably, the verb “make” in v.12 refers to the sign, not to the covenant. This verb is not used of covenants, but it is used (even in the very next verse) of signs.

This is the first instance of God’s establishing a sign or some other symbol as a reminder of a covenant. He repeats this practice subsequently in Scripture. Here is a list of all covenants that are said to be “cut”, together with their indicators.

Covenant (ref. to cutting) (<i>Italic</i> are human-human)	Other Indicator	Oath <i>\$b(\$</i>	Sign <i>)wt</i>	Witness (<i>dh</i>	Seal
God with Creation, renewed with Noah (?)			Bow, Gen 9:12-13		
God with Abraham (Gen 15:18; Neh 9:8)		Gen 22:16; cf. Heb 6:13-17	Circumcision, Gen 17:11		Rom 4:11
<i>Abraham with Abimelech (Gen 21:27,32)</i>				<i>7 ewe lambs, Gen 21:30</i>	
<i>Abimelech with Isaac (Gen 26:28)</i>	<i>Feast</i>				
<i>Laban with Jacob (Gen 31:44)</i>	<i>Meal, v.54</i>	<i>v.53</i>		<i>Cairn, v.48</i>	
God with Israel at Sinai (Ex 24:8; 34:10,27; Dt 4:23; 5:2,3; 9:9; 29:11, 13, 24; 31:16; 1 K 8:21 2 C 6:11; Jer 34:13)			Sabbath Day, Exod 20:12, 20; 31:13, 17		
<i>Israel with Gibeonites (Josh</i>	<i>Gibeonite</i>				

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9:6,7,11,15,16)	servitude?				
Joshua with Israel (Josh 24:25)				Stone, v.:27	
Israel with Ammon (1 Sam 11:1)	Put out right eyes				
David and Jonathan (1 Sam 18:3; 23:18—different?)	Jonathan' robes				
Abner and Israel with David (2 Sam 3:12,13,21; 5:3 1 Chr 11:3)	Michal; Feast				
God with David (Ps 89:3; MT v.4; Isa 55:3; 2 Chr 21:7)	Dynasty				
Solomon and Hiram (1 Kings 5:26, ET 12)	Material for temple				
BenHadad with Ahab (1 Kings 20:34)	Transfer cities				
Jehoiada with captains (2 Kings 11:4,17 2 Chr 23:3,16)		1 Kings 11:4			
Hezekiah with the Lord (2 Chr 29:10)					
Josiah with the Lord (2 Kings 23:3) 2 Chr 34:31)					
Human (Hos 10:4)		Hos 10:4			
Israel with Assyria (Hos 12:2)					
Israel's enemies against Israel (Ps 83:6 (ET 5))					
Zedekiah with people, to release slaves (Jer 34:8,15,18)					
Babylon with Israel (Ezek 17:13)		Ezek 17:13			
Israel with God, to put away strange wives (Ezra 10:3)					
Israel with itself, to keep the law (Neh 9:38)					Neh 9:38; 10:1)
God with Israel (New) (Isa 61:8; Jer 31:31-33; 32:40; Ezek 34:25; Hos 2:20 (ET 18)					HS, Eph 1:13,14; 4:30; 2 Cor 1:22

Kinds of indicator:

Witness.—Only attested in covenants among people, e.g., Laban with Jacob, 31:44. The heap of stones bears witness to the covenant in time to come, after both of the contracting individuals have passed on. Thus this is inappropriate to agreements in which God is one of the parties.

The other three are all exemplified in God's covenant with Abraham.

Sign.—Gen 17:11, circumcision.

Seal.—Thus designated in Rom 4:11. Apparently closely related to “sign”; the Greek word means both the instrument and (here) the resulting imprint, while the Hebrew word “seal” means only the instrument or the act, and the result is called a “sign.” Cf. blessing on circumcising a child, “Blessed be he who ... sealed *x*tm his offspring with the sign *ywt* of a holy covenant.” So in the NT, we find emphasis on the seal of a covenant, where in the OT we find “sign.” But note Neh 9:38; 10:1 for evidence of sealing of covenants. Thus the “sign” is like the imprint of God's signet ring.

Oath.—Gen 22:15; cf. Heb 6:17-18. The oath is what the seal guarantees.

NB: The doctrine of infant baptism is based on a supposed parallel between baptism, as the sign of the new covenant, and circumcision, as the sign of the old, but this rests on two flaws.

1. Circumcision is not a sign of the Old (i.e., Sinaitic) covenant, which has been supplanted by the New, but of the covenant with Abraham, which has never been supplanted (Galatians). The sign of Sinai was not circumcision, but the Sabbath Day: Exod 20:12, 20; 31:13, 17.
2. Baptism is *nowhere* called a “sign” or “seal” of the new covenant. The closest we come is the Holy Spirit as seal of the New Covenant, Eph 1:13,14; 4:30; 2 Cor 1:22, which corresponds with God’s promise in Ezek 36:24-27.

So it is not unusual that God’s covenants with men are marked by signs. What *is* unusual is the revelation that the sign is intended not only for human consumption, but also for God’s observation! He does not need reminding, but he means to comfort us with the realization that he remembers his covenant.

Application: God’s use of signs reminds us not to fall into either of two errors.

- He condescends to our weakness by giving us tangible signs of intangible truths. Perhaps the most precious of these are the elements at the Lord’s Supper. We ought not to despise such symbols, but treasure them and take advantage of them.
- At the same time, the sign has no power in itself, but points us back to the underlying word (see Calvin on 9:15). Some people treat signs as almost magical, a mistake that leads to the Catholic concept of sacrament. In fact, the bow doesn’t keep the world from flood; God’s covenant does, and the bow is there only to remind us that he remembers his covenant.

17, Summary

Here we have the two drawn together again, the sign and the covenant.

9:18-27, Noah’s Sons in their Moral Environment, cf. 6:9-10

Our section began with a comment on Noah’s moral excellence and his three sons. It closes with his three sons, and an observation on his moral state. This sobering conclusion reminds us that Noah, for all his obedience to the Lord, is ultimately just flesh, and needs the Lord’s sustaining hand to enable him to live a godly life.

20-23, The Events

20-21, Noah’s Vineyard.—Probably, the verse should be translated, “Noah, master of the earth, was the first to plant a vineyard.

- “Master of the earth” reflects the fulfillment of Lamech’s prophecy (5:29) that Noah would bring comfort from the curse upon the earth.
- If he indeed invented viticulture, we can understand how he may have been taken by surprise by the intoxicating effects of the wine. Also, it is reported that the oldest evidences of viticulture are from the area of Armenia or northern Iran, where Noah landed. A wine jar from 3000 BC has been recovered from Hajji Firaz Tepe in northwestern Iran.

22, Ham's Sin.—Must be in the way in which he described the events to his brothers. Dishonoring of parents is a serious sin in the Bible.

- It is punishable by death, Deut 21:18-21.
- The combination of observation and speech may be explicitly reflected in Prov 30:17: “The eye [that] mocketh at [his] father, and despiseth to obey [his] mother, the ravens of the valley shall pick it out, and the young eagles shall eat it.”
- Cf. Prov 25:9,10; Matt 18:15. The correct way to deal with someone's shortcoming is not to tell others about it first, but to try to correct it with the individual concerned. Ham violated this basic principle.

23, Shem and Japheth.—They take steps to correct the problem, and do their best to retain their attitude of honor for their father.

24-27, The Curse and Blessing

When Noah learns what has happened, he prophecies concerning each of his sons. Manifestly, the prophecies concern the nations that come from them, not they or their immediate descendants. This insight is critical to understand the first declaration.

As we shall see in more detail in chapter 10,

- Ham's descendants moved south to populate Africa. From them come the Egyptians and the tribes Israel found in Palestine.
- Japheth's descendants moved north to populate Europe and Asia. We are all mainly Japhethites.
- Shem's descendants (the “shemitic” or “semitic” people) remained near the center, in Mesopotamia and the Arabian peninsula. From them God chose Abraham and his descendants.

25, Curse on Canaan.—The point here is not to curse the individual Canaan, the youngest son of Ham, but rather that people descending from Ham with whom the Israelites, the descendants of Shem, would have most to do, namely the Canaanite people whom they drove out from the promised land.

“Servant of servants”: cf. the judgment on the Gibeonites, Joshua 9:23.

26, Blessing on Shem.—Two details should be noted here.

1. The blessing is actually not on Shem, but on Shem's God. Noah gives God the glory for the godly behavior of his son. This is an important example. Noah himself, as we have often noted, is the recipient of God's unmerited favor, and he realizes that any righteousness that Shem shows over Ham is due to the Lord, not to Shem himself.
2. The last phrase, “Canaan shall be his servant,” is actually, “Canaan shall be *their* servant,” emphasizing that with Shem as with Canaan, the reference is to the nations that descend from them, not the individual himself.

The fulfillment of this blessing would be in the conquest of the Canaanites by Israel.

27, Blessing on Japheth.—Four things to note here.

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- Note the shift from YHWH in v.26 to “God” in v.27. It is in the line of Shem that the Lord makes himself known as the covenant-keeping God. Japheth knows him only in his character as creator.
- The enlarging of Japheth refers to the ascendancy of European culture.
- “Dwelling in the tents of Shem” may in fact be a prophecy of how the Gentiles come to know the blessings of salvation. Literally, the phrase refers to the conquest of the Shemites by the Japhethites (Hengstenberg, citing 1 Chron 5:10), but through that conquest, the Greeks and Romans came to know the good news that the Jew was supposed to bring to them (per Deut 20), but had failed.
- Japheth as well as Shem enjoys the servitude of Canaan; again the plural, emphasizing that we are dealing with peoples rather than individuals.

9:28-29, Closing off 5:32

These verses finish off Noah’s element in the genealogy of Gen 5, following the pattern established with the other antediluvians. They thus emphasize that the flood story is an extended parenthesis concluding that episode of human history.

Significance of the Chiasm

Overall emphases: this structure is counter-intuitive on two levels.

- A flood is, superficially at least, a chaotic, destructive event. A chiasm is a highly ordered structure, and this one has more order than most. We are reminded that what appears to be a senseless disaster from man’s perspective is under God’s control.
- What kind of ordered structure does Moses choose? Two main types, alternation and chiasm. So far in Genesis,
 - Alternation is used in ch. 1 (creation), and 5 (genealogy of the Sethite line).
 - Chiasms describe sin, where people choose to turn away from God.
 - 2-3, the fall: sin at the center, 3:6-7
 - 4, Cain and Abel: sin at the center, v.8
 - Here, at the center, God is faithful to remember his people. Moses is contrasting God’s elective love with man’s rebellion.