

ReGroups 9/10/23

Origin Stories: Covenants & Curses - Genesis 6-9

Under the Pitch

Genesis tells a story, spanning many generations and major moments in the early history of the world, but there are some consistent threads from beginning to end. It seems that every generation within Genesis has a few *common, shared experiences and encounters* with God. Particularly, every so many chapters some kind of covenant is spotlighted between God and the person of interest. Almost as frequent, we read about curses being brought upon people or groups of people as the result of some grave error or sin.

If Covenants and Curses are defining parts of every generation featured in Genesis, then that makes Noah's a *quintessential story*. Let's review an example of both:

1) In Genesis 6, God observes a world completely undone and overtaken by sin. He makes the painful decision to bring **the ultimate curse** upon the world: **Judgment**. All living things would be washed away in a global flood, *none* would be spared.

It should be noted that this curse, and any curse for that matter, are never laid upon any one or group unjustly or undeservedly. Many often misquote the Bible and suggest that God issues "*generational curses*", but upon a closer read it becomes clear that any kind of "*generational curse*" is *self-perpetuated*. As in, if a curse befalls us, it's because we welcomed it, not because we suffered in our ancestor's shadow.

Many will point to **Exodus 20:5-6** as proof of generational curses. What God is saying here is that since sin runs in our blood, the same iniquity in our forefathers indeed runs through our veins. This does not mean we are doomed to hopelessly repeat the same mistakes as our predecessors and that God is going to punish us for what they did. Contrary, the text tells us that He will provide lovingkindness and grace to those who turn to Him. Furthermore, **Ezekiel 18:20-21** is conclusive proof that we are all judged *individually* and have our own opportunities to repent and break free from any and all curses.

Does this help clear up any confusion you've had about so-called generational curses? Have you ever been so convinced that you were couldn't change or that things wouldn't change for you that you cost yourself the help which God was making available?

2) However, Noah finds grace in the eyes of God. God makes a **promise** to Noah, or an informal **covenant**, that He would spare Noah if he built an ark of safety. While this isn't often pointed to as one of the great covenants of the Bible, it definitely points to a later, much more celebrated covenant. In our earlier studies, we glossed over this important part of the story. Read **Genesis 6:11-14** and make note of God's promise to Noah. **How does He promise to save Noah's family? Are there any details that you've never noticed before?**

Here's something that doesn't get a lot of attention: The inside of the ark was covered in a substance our Bibles call "*pitch*". Studying the Hebrew word reveals that this was *an asphalt-type mixture*, used to seal the wood and protect the boat from leaks. Basically, the entire ark was coated in this substance and all under *this* covering would be saved.

The Hebrew word may literally refer to this substance, but it would go on to be used to refer to *any* kind of covering. No doubt because of this story being passed down, pitch or "*kaphar*" become synonymous with a protective buffer.

Literally it may mean a tar or asphalt, but *figuratively* it would take on a meaning of redemption and ransom. **Did you know this? Do you see why this word would become synonymous with sins being passed over and pardoned, in light of this first great means of saving the world?**

Years later, when God revealed Sacrificial System (Leviticus) to Moses, He used *this* word "*kaphar*" to refer to making atonement for sins. When they would offer blood on an altar, they were *covering* themselves just like Noah first did; see **Leviticus 16:15-18**.

So, anywhere you see the word "atonement", "propitiation", and even "reconciliation" in the Bible it's a form of this same word used in the Flood story.

Noah covered the inside of the ark with pitch to protect them from the waters of judgment. When Moses led the children of Israel to covering their doorposts in blood, they were protecting themselves from the death angel. When Aaron and the priests took the blood of the animals and covered the altar with it, they were symbolically protecting every humbled soul around the altar from suffering judgment. **Does this parallel make sense?**

We don't know if Noah knew the significance of this word, but it obviously was a *preview* of the Covenant which God made with Moses and Israel.

In the New Testament, the Greek equivalent of this same word is used over and over again to refer to our sin being covered and taken away. From **John 1:29** to **Romans 3:23-25**, and **1 John 2:2** we see how Jesus was the ultimate fulfillment of these Old Testaments prototypes.

So it could be said that both the Old Covenant and the New Covenant were actually previewed here in Genesis 6 with the ark. This mention of “*kaphar*” is the first of many, many to come that showed how God responds to our sin. Under the Old Covenant, He *temporarily* passed over sin and then under the New Covenant, He would *permanently* take away the sin of the world. You can read **Hebrews 10:11-12** for a nice and succinct summary of God’s atoning work.

Who knew that all of that could be seen in the story of Noah and the Ark? Share your thoughts about the precedents for curses and covenants set in this story.

An Overlooked Promise

After Noah exits the ark, he builds an altar to the Lord and then receives what is traditionally called the Noahic Covenant. Unfortunately, only parts of this story gets highlighted. This covenant is actually three-pronged, so let’s break it down:

1) Genesis 8:20-22 - God promises that He would never again manipulate or intervene through nature in order to punish sin. People often point the Flood story as an example of what God might do again, but here God himself makes it clear, that the Flood was the exception, not the rule. What do we make of natural disasters and tragedies that befall the world, on a regular basis? **These are symptoms of a fallen planet, not curses from our Gracious God.**

Jesus was pressed on one occasion if a disaster that came upon a group of people was proof that their sin was intolerable to the point of immediate, earthly judgment - His response in **Luke 13:1-5** should be noted. When we see the world around us crack and people suffer at its expense, we should be reminded that our only hope is to turn towards God, lest we too suffer the same fate.

2) Genesis 9:1-7 - After making a promise to Noah, God now charges Noah with a level of responsibility. It’s here that He commands Noah not only to refill the earth with people, but to also be a good caretakers of the planet and its creatures. There are so many implied commands that can be extracted from this - how we shouldn’t take for granted the provisions that God has given to us.

The world is not for our wasteful consumption - We are to be grateful stewards of all that God has supplied. This goes from the way we treat our fellow man to even how we treat/use animals and plants.

Stewardship is a principle emphasized all over the Bible. Ultimately, we will be judged for what we did and how we managed all that God has temporarily loaned us during our time on earth. In **Matthew 25:14-19**, Jesus tells a parable assuring us that we will be held accountable for what we did with our Master's property.

Also noteworthy is **Genesis 6:4** which corresponds with **Leviticus 17:11, 14**. Keeping with the theme of atonement earlier, here we get the idea that blood is sacred. Even *sinful* blood is still the proof of our life, and our value to God. This is why the blood of a spotless lamb was considered to be a means of atonement, and obviously why Jesus' blood is so precious and important. By His blood, we are washed clean and forgiven of our sins.

3) **Genesis 9:8-17** - This is the part of the Noahic Covenant that usually gets all the attention. In some ways its an extension of what was said back in chapter 8, but it brings something new to the table as well. This shows God's *commitment* to both the human race and this earth.

It's easy to wonder if God might be looking for a way out of His role as both Lord and Savior of this world and all of us in it. However, if we've ever questioned God's relentless dedication to us, this should settle that concern. Assuredly, what Jesus said in **John 3:16** is very true- God *loves* this world and He *loves* us. He is not looking for a reason to destroy it or us, but always working towards redeeming and restoring all of Creation.

Ultimately, **Revelation 21:1-5**'s preview of the New, Restored Heaven-on-Earth puts an exclamation point on God's covenant with Noah. Every rainbow reminds us that God's mercy is *everlasting* and our future is *certain*.

No matter who we are, saved or unsaved, we *all* can see the rainbows in the sky in the aftermath of a storm. While our world remains sinful and fallen, God's arms are stretched out to us all. As **Genesis 17:17** says, God made this covenant with "*all flesh*", so just as *everyone* sees the rainbow and is under the rainbow, *everyone* is given an opportunity to be saved. Until Kingdom comes, God will keep this promise with our fallen world and with every fallen creature.