



2. A Second Chance

How could Noah be righteous and a sinner at the same time? How did Noah benefit from Jesus? **Jon Garvey** tells of terrible wrath and amazing grace

The Covenant that God made with Adam, the federal representative of the entire human race, was broken by Adam's fall into sin. He and his descendants lost the blessing of God and were excluded from his presence. They lost their home in Eden and had to struggle for survival in a now hostile world.

The record shows that our race became increasingly depraved with each generation¹. Yet despite the broken Covenant, God patiently allowed time for man to master sin himself². But the task proved impossible because of our hopelessly corrupt nature. At the same time he graciously accepted atoning sacrifice³ for the restoration of fellowship with him, and led successive generations of Seth's line to call on his name in faith⁴.

But God is not mocked. The Covenant was broken by man, but remembered by God. After centuries of longsuffering he finally invoked its penalty. The Flood demonstrated his justice in utterly destroying the human race which had, collectively, eaten of the tree of knowledge and become corrupt⁵. Even the earth itself was destroyed because, as man's dominion, it had been included in the Covenant with Adam⁶.

Noah

That this was not the end of the race was only because of God's boundless grace. Among the people of his time Noah was 'righteous and blameless'⁷, but we must understand this in faith terms: it was his walk with God that made him acceptable. In himself, like the rest, he was a sinner under the curse. How do we know that?

Before the flood, God saw that 'every

inclination of the thoughts of [man's] heart was only evil all the time.'⁸ It would be no exaggeration to call that 'total depravity', would it? Yet after the flood, when God promises never to curse the earth again, he does it 'even though every inclination of [man's] heart is only evil from childhood'.⁹ So not much change there, except in dispelling the myth of childhood innocence!

Noah then, like faithful Israel in later history, is a 'remnant chosen by grace', not by his righteousness. Even so, he is chosen as the mediator of a new Covenant to replace that broken by Adam. This Covenant is the basis of his surviving the flood, and of our world's continued existence today.

The Second Covenant

Unlike Adam's, the Covenant with Noah is based on a promise – of salvation from the flood. God announces it to Noah in advance: 'Everything on earth will perish. But I will establish my covenant with you, and you will enter the ark'.¹⁰ Noah is the mediator, but the promise is for his descendants too: his sons, his wife and his sons' wives are to enter the ark with him. Like the creation Covenant, it covers the animal kingdom for Noah's sake, so pairs of animals are saved.

Noah saved by Jesus!

However the Covenant is not actually instituted until after the flood, and it is worthy of note that God makes it in response to Noah's sacrifice. We should see this sacrifice as the sacramental seal of the Covenant with Noah. Here we need to look with Christian eyes, for the Bible says that all the Old Testament sacrifices point for-

Covenant: a solemn obligation taken by one person with respect to somebody else

A people, a place, and God's blessing: this triad underpins all the Covenants

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the covenants of God

ward to Christ, and are made effective only by his own shed blood'.¹¹ So it was only the death of Christ, foreshadowed in this sacrifice, which enabled Noah to escape the penalty of Adam – and it is only because of Christ that the world has continued since then. If only it were more thankful!

Taking the long view, Noah's Covenant was instituted to preserve the world and humanity, despite its sin, until God's plan of salvation should mature. God made it on the basis of pure grace, promising the endurance of the natural order despite the continued corruption of the race. It is also unconditional – God knows that in our wretched state we would break any condition he might make, and graciously promises the continuance of the seasons¹² and of life'.¹³

It even seems that he ameliorates some of the curse suffered by Adam: 'Never again will I curse the ground because of man...'.¹⁴ We may struggle to make a living in the world now – but it seems it was even tougher before the Flood.

The Covenant is a new charter for a fallen world, that of Adam having been abrogated and, in any case, no longer suited to the changed circumstances. Noah and his sons are, like Adam, blessed by God. They are told to fill the earth. They are even restored to their dominion of creation – except that being sinners they will have a dominion based on fear and dread, rather than trust. Animals will now be food, as well as fellow-consumers. Perhaps this is a concession to man's blood-thirsty nature – but it is also God's gracious provision for easier survival in a disordered world.

So like Adam's Covenant, it promises a people, a place and God's blessing. Make a note of this triad, because it underpins all the later covenants too. In this one, though, the blessing is strictly limited to the temporal sphere – it may be universal in scope, but it is restricted in effect. It is, in fact, the basis for what theologians call 'common grace', the fact that the rain falls both on the just and the unjust'¹⁵.

Penalties

Though the covenant is unconditional in general, there are specific penalties for shedding blood – even for animals that kill

men. This is because, although the covenant with Adam might be abrogated, and man's nature defaced by sin, he is still in God's image and his life is sacred to God'.¹⁶

The prohibition against eating blood does not validate the Jehovah's Witnesses' scruples or forbid black pudding – rather it is another sign of God's gracious provision, for until Christ came blood was given to the race to make atoning sacrifice'.¹⁷

The stipulation that a murderer's blood shall be shed by man is, indeed, a valid basis for the punishment of offenders by legal process or in war. It certainly condemns those who shed blood unjustly – and that must include euthanasia and abortion. But principally it is a warning that this world will not continue forever, and that there will in the end be a day of accounting when, as Paul tells us, the world will be judged by the man he has appointed'.¹⁸ Jesus is the executor of the Covenant's penalties. 'As long as the earth endures'¹⁹ implies that there is a time when it will not, when the fullness of the ages will have come, and when all who are under Noah's Covenant will be judged.

Covenant Sign

But until then, God's rainbow has been designated a sign that the sun has broken through the clouds of God's judgement. When we see it we are to remember that God in his mercy left a remnant after his wrath was spent, to which all those alive today belong. It reminds us that all of us are living on borrowed time – yet time lent to all mankind so that, in the meantime, God might offer salvation through His Son Jesus.

In the next article we will see how that salvation begins to unfold in the Covenant he made with another undeserving sinner – Abraham.

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|----|-------------------|----|-----------------|
| 1 | Genesis 4 | 11 | Hebrews 9.23-26 |
| 2 | Genesis 4.7 | 12 | Genesis 8.22 |
| 3 | Genesis 4.4 | 13 | Genesis 9.8-11 |
| 4 | Genesis 4.26-5.32 | 14 | Genesis 8.21 |
| 5 | Genesis 6.11-12 | 15 | Matthew 5.45 |
| 6 | Genesis 1.28-29 | 16 | Genesis 9.4-6 |
| 7 | Genesis 6.9 | 17 | Leviticus 17.11 |
| 8 | Genesis 6.5 | 18 | Acts 17.31 |
| 9 | Genesis 8.21 | 19 | Genesis 8.22 |
| 10 | Genesis 6.17-18 | | |

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