Sunday, September 3, 2017

Lesson: Genesis 8:20-22; 9:8-17; Time of Action: Unknown; Place of Action: possibly the mountains of Ararat

Golden Text: “And I will establish my covenant with you, neither shall all flesh be cut off any more by the waters of a flood; neither shall there any more be a flood to destroy the earth” (Genesis 9:11).

I. INTRODUCTION. God created the whole world and people to inhabit it. When Adam and Eve chose to sin so much changed. Man’s sin caused a major divide between God and humanity. Because of sin’s downward spiral, God decided it was time to start over again. He knew there was one man, Noah, who “found grace in the eyes of the Lord” because he was a righteous man (see Genesis 6:8-9). So God spared Noah and his family from the devastation of the punishment—the Flood. After Noah, his family, and the animals left the ark, the world they saw was fresh and new. God made a covenant with Noah. A covenant is a pledge, a binding agreement.
II. LESSON BACKGROUND. After man and woman were evicted from the Garden of Eden, they began to replenish the earth as God had commanded by giving birth to Cain and Abel and Seth (see Genesis chapter 4). Chapter five gives us the genealogy of Adam down to Noah, the son of Lamech. We are then told that Noah had three sons, Shem, Ham and Japheth. Chapter six records that soon men began to multiply on the face of the earth (see Genesis 6:1). Before long, society degenerated to the point that “every intent” of the thoughts of man’s heart “was continually evil” (see Genesis 6:5). Instead of living responsibly as persons created in the image and likeness of God, people lived like beasts (sound familiar?). The situation was hopeless, causing God, like a parent whose children have gone bad to mourn for them. The Lord was sorry that He had created man and was grieved in his heart (see Genesis 6:6). He would now destroy everything He had created except for Noah and His family (see Genesis 6:7). God then tells Noah that He is going to destroy man “with the earth” (see Genesis 6:13) and directs him to build an ark for his family and every kind of animal because He would bring a flood upon the earth, and Noah obeyed (see Genesis 6:14-22). Chapter 7 gives the details of the judgment of the flood itself. Noah was commanded by God to take his entire family into the ark along with seven of every kind of clean animals both male and female, and two of every kind of unclean animals (see Leviticus 1-31). The rain came when Noah was 600 years old and lasted forty days and
forty nights (see Genesis 7:1-12). The day the rains came Noah and his family entered the ark and the water covered the earth for 150 days destroying all flesh and animals (see Genesis 7:13-24). After slightly more than a year in the ark, when Noah was about 601 years old, he, his family and all the animals came out of the ark to an earth that was returning to normal (see Genesis 8:13-19). This is where the first part of our lesson begins.

III. GOD’S PROMISE (Genesis 8:20-22)

A. Noah’s sacrifice of thanksgiving and worship (Genesis 8:20). Our first verse says “And Noah builded an altar unto the Lord; and took of every clean beast, and of every clean fowl, and offered burnt offerings on the altar.” We are told that “Noah’s” first recorded act after coming out of the ark was that he “builted an altar unto the Lord.” An “altar” was usually a stone structure on which animals were slaughtered and burned as offerings and sacrifices. Although altars may have been used earlier, this is the first time one is mentioned in Scripture and “Noah” built it for “the Lord.” After building the “altar,” he “took of every clean beast, and of every clean fowl, and offered burnt offerings on the altar.” The sacrifices that Noah would offer to God were on behalf of himself and his family. This was Noah’s way of showing gratitude to God for His favor and mercy in saving them from the Flood as well as
a sign of worship. It was entirely the right thing for Noah to pay homage to the One who had delivered him and his family from the Flood. The principle of sacrifice had been handed down from the days of Abel (see Genesis 4:4). Notice that he “offered burnt offerings on the altar” that included only “clean beast” or animals, as well as “clean fowl” or birds. Later, the law of Moses made the distinction for Israel between animals that were “clean” meaning those that were appropriate for eating and sacrifice, and those that were “unclean” meaning animals that were inappropriate for eating or sacrifice (see Leviticus 1:2, 10, 14; 11:1-47). It appears that the distinction between “clean” and “unclean” animals must have already existed in Noah’s day (at least for sacrifices) because God had commanded him to take into the ark seven each of the “clean” animals but only two each of the unclean ones (see Genesis 6:19-20; 7:2-3). Note: Under the new covenant (see Hebrews 10:16-17), Jesus Christ’s all-sufficient sacrifice removed the need for anymore animal sacrifices (see Hebrews 9:24-26; 10:1-12). In addition, the laws governing what one could eat or not eat have also been removed (see Colossians 2:16-17).

B. Man’s waywardness (Genesis 8:21). This verse goes on to say “And the Lord smelled a sweet savour; and the Lord said in his heart, I will not again curse the ground any more for man’s sake; for the imagination of man’s heart is evil from his youth; neither will I again smite any more every thing living, as I have done.” We
know that God was pleased with Noah’s offerings because “the Lord smelled a sweet savour.” In other words, the aroma from the sacrificial offerings smelled good to God. The description that God “smelled a sweet savour” is an anthropomorphism which means describing God using human characteristics. Since God is a spiritual being and beyond our understanding (see Isaiah 55:9), using human characteristics to describe Him help us understand what we can’t otherwise comprehend about Him. In this case, the characteristic of smell is used to describe God’s satisfaction with Noah’s sacrificial offering. Just as a sweet odor is pleasant to a person, likewise sacrifices of love are pleasing to God. This act of worship met God’s approval, so He made a commitment to Noah, his family and their descendants. God declared “in his heart, I will not again curse the ground any more for man’s sake.” God had earlier cursed the ground because of Adam’s sin (Genesis 3:17-19). God’s promise recorded here didn’t invalidate or remove that curse, and it won’t be removed until Jesus returns and God’s people dwell in the Holy City (see Revelation 22:3). But in His grace, God decided not to add to man’s troubles. The Lord said that the reason He will never again send a universal flood was because “the imagination of man’s heart is evil from his youth.” At first glance, this statement appears to be a contradiction since it was because of people’s “evil” hearts that God had brought the Flood on them in the first place. But now God was making a different point. God had sufficiently taught the world through the judgment of the Flood the severe lesson that He punishes sin. Now He indicated that judgment does not solve man’s sin problem. In spite of the Flood’s purification of the earth, every new
generation of people would be incurably “evil” or sinful. Therefore, God’s answer to this problem of man’s sin would not be judgment over and over again, but providing a means of redemption for sinners. Much of the rest of Scripture is dedicated to that provision—Jesus Christ (see I Corinthians 1:30; Ephesians 1:5-7; Colossians 1:12-14; Galatians 3:13; I Peter 1:18-19). God also declared “neither will I again smite any more every thing living, as I have done.” In other words, God will never again destroy the entire earth with water. He knew that man’s thoughts and intents were “evil from his youth.” Therefore, destruction of the earth would not be the answer. Man would need a new “heart.” He would need God’s law placed in his “heart” (see Jeremiah 31:33; Hebrews 10:16). Note: We should not think that God doesn’t judge sin today or that there will be no future judgment of the world. Romans 1:18 makes it clear that God’s judgment is being revealed against sinners right now through the consequences of their sins. God gave them over to their own sinful bondage and gave them up to the consequences of their sins in their own bodies (Romans 1:21-32). One of the greatest judgments God can send to sinners is to let them have their own way and then pay for it in their own lives. That’s the judgment the world is experiencing right now. For sure, there will be a future worldwide judgment, but not a judgment of water; it will be a judgment of fire (II Peter 3:10).

C. God’s commitment (Genesis 8:22). The Lord
continued to say in this verse “While the earth remaineth, seedtime and harvest, and cold and heat, and summer and winter, and day and night shall not cease.” The phrase “While the earth remaineth,” verifies that there will come a time when the earth will no longer exist. It will be destroyed as declared by II Peter 3:10. But God said until that happens there will continue to be “seedtime and harvest, and cold and heat, and summer and winter, and day and night.” In other words, the seasons here described as “seedtime and harvest, and cold and heat, and summer and winter” as well as “day and night shall not cease.” The flood had interrupted the normal cycle of the seasons for a year, but that would never be repeated again. Instead, God reaffirmed that the rhythm of days and weeks and seasons would continue as long as the earth lasts. Without this guarantee, mankind could never be sure of having the necessities of life.  

**Note:** We know now that the steady cycle of days and nights, weeks and months, seasons and years, is maintained by the rotation of the earth on its axis and the orbit of the earth around the sun. God made it that way so that His universe would operate effectively. Although there were numerous galaxies to choose from, the Lord chose to pour His love and grace down upon the inhabitants of the earth for “The earth is the Lord’s” (see Psalms 24:1). The Lord arranged the universe so that the living things on earth might be maintained, and this includes men and women who too often forget God’s care. God’s guarantee here in Genesis 8:22 gives us hope and courage as we face an unknown future. Each time we go to bed for the night, or turn the calendar to a new
month, we should be reminded that God is concerned about planet earth and its inhabitants. With the invention of the electric light and modern means of transportation and communication, our world has moved away from living by the cycles of nature established by God. We no longer go to bed at sundown and get up at sunrise, and if we don’t like the weather where we are, we can quickly travel to a different climate. But if God were to dim the sun, rearrange the seasons, or tilt the earth at a different angle, our lives would be in jeopardy. God’s “covenant of day and night” is especially meaningful to the people of Israel, for it guarantees them His care and protection so that they will never cease to be a nation (see Jeremiah 33:19-26). God’s promise that He will not send another flood is assurance to the Jews that His covenant with them will never be broken (see Isaiah 54:7-10). We are prone to take for granted sunrise and sunset, the changing face of the moon and the changing seasons, but all of these functions are evidences that God is on the throne and keeping His promises. All creation preaches a constant sermon day after day and season after season that assures us of God’s loving care. We can trust His Word, for “there has not failed one word of all His good promise” (see I Kings 8:56).

IV. GOD’S COVENANT ESTABLISHED (Genesis 9:8-11).
After the Flood waters receded, God gave guidelines for Noah and his family just as He had done with Adam. They were to be fruitful and multiply and fill the earth with people. Noah was also given dominion over the animal world and the freedom to eat meat instead of just vegetation (see Genesis 1:29; 9:1-3). However, man was restricted from eating meat that still contained blood meaning raw meat (see Genesis 9:4). They were also reminded that because human life is created in the image of God, they were to refrain from shedding human blood or murder, and capital punishment was to be meted out to those who violated this command (see Genesis 9:1-7). Prior to the flood, mankind didn’t have a very good track record when it came to caring for one another. Cain had killed his brother Abel (see Genesis 4:8), Lamech had killed a young man and bragged about it (see Genesis 4:22-23), and the earth had been filled with all kinds of violence (see Genesis 6:11, 13). God had put the fear of humans into the animals (see Genesis 9:2), but now He had to put the fear of God into humans or they would destroy one another (see Genesis 9:5-6)! This is where the second part of our lesson begins.

A. God’s covenant promises to Noah and his descendants (Genesis 9:8-9).

1. (vs. 8). This verse simply says “And God spake unto Noah, and to his sons with him, saying.” God spoke directly to “Noah” and his three “sons,” Shem, Ham and Japheth (see Genesis 5:32). Only “his sons” and their wives along with Noah and his wife, a total of eight people were preserved during the flood. It was through
these eight people that the earth would be repopulated. God’s next words were intended for all of their descendants.

2. (vs. 9). Having the attention of Noah and his sons, God said “And I, behold, I establish my covenant with you, and with your seed after you.” God would make a “covenant” with Noah, his sons and “your seed after you” which is a reference to all of their descendants including you and me. Again, we must not forget that everyone who has inhabited the earth since Noah and his family are the descendants or “seed” of this family. Noah and his family were simply human beings: they were not Jews or any other race of people. A “covenant” is a formal agreement, or contract between two parties in which certain obligations are specified. This covenant in our lesson is known as the Noahic Covenant, and it is an unconditional covenant. In other words, the obligations specified in it are dependent upon God and Him alone. Noah had no specified obligations or requirements to meet in this covenant. **Note:**

**In the Scriptures there are two types of covenants, conditional and unconditional. In a conditional covenant both parties have obligations within the covenant. For instance, the Mosaic Covenant is a conditional covenant. God’s fulfillment of all the promises of the Mosaic Covenant is conditioned upon Israel’s obedience as implied by the words “...if ye will obey...then ye shall be...” (see Exodus 19:5-8). Basically, in an conditional covenant, God says “If you will...then I will...” If the second party fails to keep their part of the covenant, God does not have to keep His part. But in an unconditional covenant, only God is
responsible for keeping the covenant. For instance, the Abrahamic Covenant is an unconditional covenant. In it God declares simply, “I will make of thee a great nation, and I will bless thee...and I will bless them that bless you and curse them that curse you...” (see Genesis 12:2-). Keeping that covenant is dependent on God alone. Abraham was not required to do anything.

B. The covenant was with all living creatures (Genesis 9:10). Not only was the covenant with Noah and his descendants, God said that it was also “with every living creature that is with you, of the fowl, of the cattle, and of every beast of the earth with you; from all that go out of the ark, to every beast of the earth.” Since all animals were affected by mankind’s sin, every creature that came out of the ark would be under this covenant or agreement. While animals don’t have eternal souls as people do, they are God’s creatures and He is concerned about them as well (see Matthew 6:25-26). Note: Since there are so many kinds of animals in the world, some people have questioned whether Noah had the ability to capture them and keep them in the ark for a whole year. In addition, many people question whether the Flood covered the entire earth or only a part of it allowing for the capture of animals in a local area. Although these questions may be valid concerns, we must take into consideration that all of this was supernatural and can be easily addressed. First, it was God who brought the animals to Noah whose job was to “bring them into the
ark” (see Genesis 6:20; 7:9). Second, it was God who brought the Flood upon the earth (see Genesis 6:17). Therefore, a flood that covered the entire earth and the gathering of all kinds of animals would be no problem for the Almighty God (see Isaiah 40:25-26; 42:5; 45:7-8, 12, 18; Ephesians 3:9; Colossians 1:16). Third, there is no doubt that the Great Flood destroyed the entire human race with the exception of those in the ark. Further proof of a worldwide flood is given in Genesis 8:21 where the Lord says “Neither will I again smite any more “every thing living,” as I have done.”

C. The covenant has a specific promise (see Genesis 9:11). In this verse, God continues to say “And I will establish my covenant with you, neither shall all flesh be cut off any more by the waters of a flood; neither shall there any more be a flood to destroy the earth.” God now confirms the central feature of His covenant that makes it unconditional—“neither shall all flesh be cut off any more by the waters of a flood; neither shall there any more be a flood to destroy the earth.” In other words, God declared that never again would the earth or all the life upon it be destroyed by a flood. He didn’t promise that there would not be any more floods, but rather that never again will “all flesh be cut off” by a universal or worldwide flood bringing devastation to the entire earth. The Flood in Noah’s time was a onetime event. It will not be repeated! Note: This does not mean that God will never destroy the earth again; however, the
next time, it will be done with fire instead of water. It should be noted that God’s “covenant” did not rule out any future judgments. The phrase “While the earth remaineth” (see Genesis 8:22) implies that this earth was not intended to be eternal. The Day of the Lord is coming and it will be severe with the earth being destroyed not by water, but by fire (see II Peter 3:10-12).

V. GOD’S TOKEN OF THE COVENANT (Genesis 9:12-17)

A. The sign of the rainbow (Genesis 9:12-13).

1. (vs. 12). This verse tells us “And God said, This is the token of the covenant which I make between me and you and every living creature that is with you, for perpetual generations.” As a guarantee that He would fulfill this “covenant” that He made with Noah and his sons, God gave a “token” or sign, that would be a reminder to earth dwellers of God’s faithfulness to His “covenant.” This “token” or sign was intended for “every living creature” that was with Noah and his sons and even “for perpetual generations” meaning for “generations” to come.

2. (vs. 13). God continued to say “I do set my
bow in the cloud, and it shall be for a token of a covenant between me and the earth.” The sign that God would be faithful to keep His “covenant between me (Him) and the earth” would be the “bow in the cloud.” This of course refers to the “rainbow.” God told Noah that the “bow” or rainbow would be a visual reminder of His promise to never flood the whole world again. Note: Whether rainbows first appeared at this time or were merely given a new significance is a matter of debate. It is possible that God took an already familiar phenomenon to mankind and gave it a higher purpose. On the other hand, it’s possible that the atmospheric conditions were permanently changed after the Flood, and that rainbows became visible for the first time. For example, Scripture tells us that no rain fell at the beginning of creation and makes not mention that any fell at any time before the Flood. In fact, prior to the Flood, the earth was watered not by rain, but by a heavy mist (see Genesis 2:5-6). The rainbow is a bonus for us after a rainstorm. We don’t always see it, for we are not always in the proper position, or conditions may not be just right. A rainbow is caused by the reflection and retraction of the sun’s rays as they hit falling rain, mist or watery spray. Since no rain had fallen before the Flood (see Genesis 2:5), no rainbow was needed. Now, after a rain, when clouds clear away, light refraction shows the marvelous rainbow. Noah and his family may have been afraid that if rain began to fall again, another opening of “the windows of heaven” (see Genesis 7:11) was coming and another huge flood was on the way. Seeing the rainbow would remove those
fears. *Just as the rainbow would remind Noah of God’s promise to never destroy the world again by water, likewise, we should be reminded of all God’s promises and His faithfulness to keep them when we see a rainbow.*

B. The creation of the rainbow (Genesis 9:14-15).

1. (vs. 14). In this verse, God went on to say “And it shall come to pass, when I bring a cloud over the earth, that the bow shall be seen in the cloud.” God further stated that whenever He brought a cloud over the earth after a rain, the “bow shall be seen in the cloud.” Rainbows are caused by the sunlight filtering through the water in the air, with each drop becoming a prism to release the colors hidden in the white light of the sun. Rainbows are fragile, but beautiful, and nobody has to pay to see them! **Note:** *It’s interesting that the apostle John described the heavenly throne room as being surrounded by a rainbow (see Revelation 4:3). It’s as though God took a part of heaven and made it His sign for all mankind.*

2. (vs. 15). The Lord continued to say “And I will remember my covenant, which is between me and you and every living creature of all flesh; and the waters shall no more become a flood to destroy all flesh.” God put the rainbow in the sky as a reminder to mankind of His promise. But He also stated that the rainbow would also be a reminder to Him of His “covenant” between Him, man and
every living creature. Again, the Lord restated His “covenant” that “the waters shall no more become a flood to destroy all flesh.” In other words, when the rainbow appears in the sky, it would remind Him of His promise not to destroy the earth by water again. If a tremendous rainstorm occurred again, this could cause great fear in man, so it was important for man to be assured that the earth would not be destroyed by water again. **Note:** The question may arise as to why God would need to be reminded of His covenant promise since He knows everything. The writer, Moses is here speaking of God using an anthropomorphism, or a human quality to describe God. In order to help the reader better understand God, the writer uses language that would cause the reader to better relate to God.

**C. The rainbow as a reminder (Genesis 9:16-17).**

1. (vs. 16). The keeping of this covenant promise was so important to God that He repeated it again saying “And the bow shall be in the cloud; and I will look upon it, that I may remember the everlasting covenant between God and every living creature of all flesh that is upon the earth.” Once again the Lord reassured Noah and his sons that the rainbow was a reminder to Him as well as to them, and that it included “every living creature of all flesh that is upon the earth.” However, this time God referred to the “covenant” as the “everlasting covenant.” As stated earlier, this is an unconditional “covenant” (see
commentary on verse 9) for all living creatures and it has no ending time. It was unconditional because Noah had no requirements to meet in keeping the “covenant;” it was all God’s responsibility. But the rainbow isn’t only for us to see, for the Lord said, “and I will look upon it, that I may remember the everlasting covenant between God and every living creature of all flesh that is upon the earth.” Certainly God doesn’t forget His covenants with His people, but this is just another way of assuring us that we don’t need to be afraid. When we look at the rainbow, we know that our Father is also looking at the rainbow, and therefore it becomes a bridge that brings us together. **Note:** Three men in Scripture saw significant rainbows. Noah saw the rainbow after the storm, just as God’s people see it today. But the prophet Ezekiel saw the rainbow in the midst of the storm when he had that remarkable vision of the wheels and the throne (see Ezekiel 1:4-28). Of course, the apostle John saw the rainbow before the storm of judgment broke loose (see Revelation 4:3; 6:1-17). In fact, John saw a complete rainbow around the throne of God! The personal lesson for God’s people is simply this: in the storms of life, always look for the rainbow of God’s covenant promise. Like John, you may see the rainbow before the storm; like Ezekiel, you may see it in the midst of the storm; or like Noah, you may have to wait until after the storm. But you will always see the rainbow of God’s promise if you look by faith. God’s covenant with creation affects every living creature on earth. Without it, we would have no assurance that nature will continue from day to day and from season to season. We would never know when the next storm was coming and whether it would be our
last.

2. (vs. 17). Our final verse says “And God said unto Noah, This is the token of the covenant, which I have established between me and all flesh that is upon the earth.” Here God once again reassures “Noah” that the rainbow is the “token” or sign that He will not destroy the earth by water again, and that “the covenant” was between God and “all flesh” that will ever inhabit the earth, including animals.

VI. Conclusion. God’s covenant with Noah refers specifically to God’s promise to never again destroy the earth with floodwaters. The rainbow was given as a guarantee of God’s promise. We can all appreciate the beauty of a rainbow, which often signals that a rainstorm is over. The rainbow should also remind us of God’s covenant promise to Noah, all of his descendants and all animals. Every time we see a rainbow in the sky, we should be reminded that it is a sign that God will never again send a universal flood to devastate the earth and destroy mankind. The rainbow is therefore a reminder to mankind of God’s marvelous grace. It behooves every believer to personalize the significance of the rainbow. Upon seeing one, we should also think of God’s love, mercy, and grace in giving us salvation through the Lord Jesus Christ.

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