

CGYG / LIFE Bible Study Series 2006-07: Genesis
Genesis 9:1-17 – A Covenant God

June 15, 2007

Today's passage highlights two extremely important aspects of God's character that need to shape our worldview. The first is that human life is sacred in God's eyes, and the second is that He is a God of covenants or promises. Covenants are used in various contexts today, although they're not normally called covenants. Webster's dictionary defines a covenant as a "...formal, solemn, and binding agreement." So a covenant requires at least two parties, because it is an agreement. Marriages and business contracts, for example, could be called forms of a covenant. Out of His own character of mercy, Scripture tells us that God initiates, sustains and carries through the great promise that He would be their God, and they would be His people. In our world today, we who are Christians need be reminded that God has made this promise to every person, that salvation and eternal life *will* be theirs if they believe upon Jesus Christ alone.

In your groups, consider one of these two questions: 1) Do you think we live in a society or culture that upholds the sanctity of human life (why or why not?); 2) When was the last time that you made a 'promise' to someone? What was that promise and did you fulfill it?

Read Genesis 9:1-7

1. What was God's blessing (and command) towards Noah and his sons (v.1, 7)? What was different now in how man would relate to other creatures (v. 2-3, c.f. Gen 1:29)?
2. What was the condition placed on this (v.4)? Why was this so important (Lev 17: 10-12)? It says in these verses that God would 'demand an accounting' for every life that is taken – what does this say about value of life, in general?
3. What does Scripture say about those who commit murder (v.5-6)? What is the specific reason given for this, and what does this tell us about the unique value of human life (Gen 1:26-27)? Do you think this is license for personal revenge? See Num 35:30, Deut 17:6, Rom 13:1-4. What specific boundaries and guidelines do these verses tell us about judgment and punishment of the accused?
4. Take some time to consider all that the Bible says about the value and sanctity of human life (see also Psalm 8:3-9). Consider the full extent of this – every person is equally high value in God's sight, regardless of socio-economic background, culture, physical or intellectual ability because they bear the image of their Creator, tainted as the image may be. In what ways do we need to ask God to change our attitudes and actions so that we reflect this truth?

Read Genesis 9:8-17

We've read the Webster's definition of what a covenant is. In Scripture, a biblical covenant is "a clear statement of God's purposes and intentions expressed in terms that bind God by solemn oath to perform what He has promised".

5. Who initiated the covenant here, and what was the nature of the covenant (v.8-11, 15)? With whom was this covenant made (v.9-10, 12)? How was God going to show that He would remember His promise (v.12-16)? Were there any conditions on Noah's part that was attached to this covenant? What does this say about God's character in how He chooses to relate to humanity through this covenant?

Unlike sinful man who makes and breaks promises all the time, God is unchanging (James 1:17, Mal 3:6) and is always true to His promises. We'll spend the remaining time looking at two other covenants that God made. The first of these, His covenant with Moses and with Israel foreshadowed the coming of the second one, recorded in the New Testament, which carries forth to today. This was God's promise of salvation for all people who put their faith in Jesus Christ.

The 'Mosaic Covenant'

In Exodus 19-23, after leading the Israelites out of captivity in Egypt, God spoke to Moses on Mount Sinai, giving him various laws that Israel was to follow and obey. Throughout these chapters, God gave Moses law after law on how the people of God were to live and to worship God, from Sabbath laws to 'social' laws on how to deal with various offenders. After relaying the first set of commandments and laws to the people (Ex 24:3), Moses was led again back up to Mount Sinai and given more instructions by God, this time staying on the mountain for 40 days and nights (24:18).

6. Read Exodus 24:1-12. What did Moses do after he had finished hearing from God? What was the 'Book of the Covenant' (v.7)? How did God confirm that this was indeed His covenant with Israel (v.12, see also 31:18)?

7. What did God promise He would do if they obeyed Him (e.g. Ex 29:42-46; also Lev 26:1-13)? What are some examples of what happened (e.g. Ex 32:7-10, 31-35) and would happen (e.g. Lev 26:14-46) when the Israelites disobeyed Him?

8. God's covenant with Israel, through His given laws, drew out the clear contrast between God's holiness and man's sinfulness. Instead of repeatedly disobeying God and scorning His grace, they were to strive for obedience, repent when they sinned, plead for God's mercy and look forward to the coming of a Saviour that God would provide. Read Jeremiah 31:31-34. What was God going to do? What would this new covenant compare with the old one?

The New Covenant in Christ

9. Read Matthew 26:26-30 and 1 Corinthians 11:23-26. What were the bread and the cup symbolic of? What exactly was this new promise, or covenant that Jesus was speaking about, and that Paul referred to (see also John 6:32-35, 47-59)?

10. Read Hebrews 8:3-13. How does this writer contrast the new covenant in Christ with the old one given to Israel?

11. Why was the shedding of blood required as part of both the old covenant (e.g. question 2, and Ex 24:8)? In what ways was the shedding of Christ's blood on the cross far superior to the sacrificial rituals of old (see Heb 9:11-22)?

Taking every thought captive...

We live in a world where God has declared a 'new covenant' – a promise that He will save those who place their faith and trust in Jesus Christ for the forgiveness of sin. It is a binding covenant, based on God's unchanging character and ultimately proven by Jesus' death on the cross, where He bore the sins of all mankind and the full wrath of God as judgment for sin. What can we do to respond to the promise of God? Only one thing: we are to believe the promise, **by faith**, and consider God's Word so trustworthy, that we step out to act on what He says. Scripture tells us that it is the nature of true faith to express itself in action. Those Israelites who **heard and believed** God's covenant promises in the age of the law followed His commands willingly; and when they sinned, they offered the required sacrifices. Today we who trust Jesus also find our faith expressing itself in similar loving obedience to Scripture and the Spirit. God's wonderful covenant to us today can be summed up in a familiar verse: "*For God so loved the world that He gave His one and only Son that whoever **believes** in Him shall not perish but have eternal life.*" – John 3:16.