

LIFE BIBLE STUDY

SESSION OBJECTIVE: GENESIS 9:1-29

To understand how things were after the flood, and what happened to Noah and his family.

The Aftermath

One of the shortcomings of the modern evangelical church is our tendency to magnify some of the more minor details of the Noah story over more important ones. Determining the exact number of animals that went on to the ark was not the intent of the author of Genesis. When the story is told with those types of questions



emphasized, it's easy to lose sight of the unimaginably difficult state that Noah and his family were left in post-flood. Noah experienced a type and level of judgment that the world had never seen and has never seen to this day. Imagine your day today (or yesterday if it's morning for you right now). Imagine everyone you saw on the roads as you drove your vehicle, the people at the store, the families at the restaurant you went to, the parents walking their kids home from school, and the countless other places you have interacted with human beings. Imagine the conversations you've had with people at church, the relationships you have forged over the years. Now, imagine that some apocalyptic event took place, you got inside of a big boat-like object that God told you to build, and when you stepped back out of it months later, *everyone had died*. And the bodies of not the people, but the leftover animals didn't just disappear. You likely have to step over and around death everywhere you looks as you make your way on to dry ground and set up camp (because your home is destroyed).

Are you getting the picture? The aftermath of the Noah story is unbearably grim, and yet very little is ever said of this reality. Genesis 9 is going to show us the aftermath, give us a picture of what Noah's lineage would become, and ultimately set the stage for another act of judgment.

Ch-Ch-Changes

After the flood, one would expect some pretty major changes to occur. God had destroyed, “all flesh,” that was not on the ark (Gen. 6:13). While there are certainly some similarities to how things were prior to the flood, there are some pretty enormous changes that followed as well. Below is a brief overview of some of these similarities and differences.

THE MANDATE

If you recall back to chapter 1, you will remember the first command God gave man and woman in verse 28: “Be fruitful and multiply and fill the earth and subdue it, and have dominion over the fish of the sea and over the birds of the heavens and over every living thing that moves on the earth.” These are marching orders of sorts for humanity, and we find them again in the beginning of chapter 9. Verse 1 reads, “And God blessed Noah and his sons and said to them, ‘Be fruitful and multiply and fill the earth.’” Verse 7 reemphasizes this: “And you, be fruitful and multiply, increase greatly on the earth and multiply in it.” After judging humanity, God blesses humanity and allows once more for the procreation process to begin to populate the earth. The *reset* that the flood brought about was complete.

However, there is a subtle shift in the mandate as well. Dominion is given over all of creation to man and woman with the intent that man and woman are stewards of creation. However, because of sin, humanity did not fulfill their God-given task. While man and woman still have dominion over the animals preserved in the ark after the flood, their relationship to the animals changes. Genesis 9:2-3 reads, “The fear of you and the dread of you shall be upon every beast of the earth and upon every bird of the heavens, upon everything that creeps on the ground and all the fish of the sea. Into your hand they are delivered. *Every moving thing that lives shall be food for you.* And as I gave you the green plants, I give you everything.” For the first time in creation history, meat is on the menu. It is easy to see this as a means of protection for animals in our modern world. Certainly, animals are lesser threats than humanity, especially with the advent of modern weapons. However, it is more likely that this fear and dread given to animals is a means to protect *humanity*. It’s much more difficult to survive against the beasts of the field without guns. Without this instinctual fear mechanism given to animals, humans would have been subject to much more dangerous attacks by predators in the wild.

THE IMAGE OF GOD

Another defining characteristic of humanity in the creation narrative was the reality that man and woman are created, “in the Image of God” (Gen. 1:27). This reality is reiterated post-flood, but under much different conditions. In chapter 1, the image of God is revealed as proof that man is the cornerstone achievement of God’s creation. In chapter 9, it’s restated to validate the severity of punishment for murder. Given that murder has now occurred multiple times in the fallen world, established grounds for punishment were necessary. The punishment for death is death. Verse 5 indicates, “And for your lifeblood I will require a reckoning: from every beast I will require it and from man. From his fellow man I will require a reckoning for the life of man.” This might come as a shock to the reader. After the flood event, perhaps one of the last things one might expect to read is God’s promotion of humanity over all living things. However, men and women are still made in God’s image, and that unique feature of humanity sets us apart from all other life. Therefore, when either an animal or another human takes the life of a human, their life will be required of them.

Never Again

Next, God covenants to never again bring another flood event (Gen. 9:11). God’s covenant is not just for Noah and his sons, but to their offspring and to every living creature (Gen. 9:8-10). This is what has come to be

called, “The Noahic Covenant.” It is a covenant with all of creation that God has made to never again destroy life by water. Just as we might expect, the covenant is ratified with a sign (Gen. 9:12-17). The sign of the covenant is the rainbow placed in the sky between God and the earth. It’s interesting that often the rainbow is said to serve us as a reminder of God’s promise to never flood the earth again. However, upon further inspection we find that the rainbow doesn’t serve to remind us, but God. He says in verse 16, “When the bow is in the clouds, I will see it and remember the everlasting covenant between God and every living creature of all flesh that is on the earth.”

Uncovered

After the flood, Noah becomes, “a man of the ground” (Gen. 9:20). There is almost certainly some intentionality in the phrasing here. At the start of creation, the chief representative of creation (Adam) was formed from the ground. Now, at the second start of creation, the chief representative of creation (Noah) becomes a man of the ground. It seems that in tending to the ground he began a vineyard. The tendency might be to want to make this passage about Noah getting drunk, but that doesn’t seem to be the focus of the passage. There is almost no detail given regarding how it happened. Certainly wine was not an inherently bad thing in the Old Testament (Jdg. 9:13; Ps. 104:15; Pr. 31:6). Nothing is said of the morality of Noah here at all. Perhaps he had consumed too much purposefully. That doesn’t fit with the character of Noah, who was, “a righteous man, blameless in his generation,” and who, “walked with God” (Gen. 6:9). However, he had also lived through the death of literally everyone who lived on the earth, barring his family who came with him on the ark. It is conceivable that such an experience took its toll on Noah. Alas, there is no textual indication that such has happened. It is also possible that perhaps in tasting the wine he was making, he imbibed too much.

Following his intoxication, he ends up falling asleep, “uncovered,” meaning he was naked. Once again, it’s hard to know what happened for certainty. On the one hand, alcohol and nakedness do find some other connections in the Old Testament (Hab. 2:16; Lam. 4:21b). It seems like there are some properties in alcohol that inhibit one unto nakedness. Modesty was sadly a much bigger deal in the Old Testament than it is now. The first thing that God does for man and woman after the fall is sew together clothing for them to cover their nakedness (Gen. 3:21). There are strict charges regarding covering one’s genitals in public (Ex. 20:26; 28:42), and charges against specifically looking on the nakedness of one’s family (Lev. 18:6-18). Alcohol seems to remove inhibitions and numb the heart towards the severity of nakedness. On the other hand, Noah wasn’t naked in public, and technically did nothing wrong. It’s possible he uncovered himself merely to sleep. The problem detailed in this part of chapter 9 would have been as much of a problem if Noah would have been sober.

The crux of the problem described in this passage isn’t really the fact that Noah was drunk or naked, but that his son Ham saw him naked. There have been suggestions in the past that Ham was the one who actually uncovered Noah, but there is no textual evidence of this. There have also been suggestions that Ham engaged in some form of sexual immorality either with his father Noah or his mother. Once again, the text lacks any support of such a claim. The issue at hand is two-fold. For one, Ham saw his father naked and neglected to cover him in a modest way. This is highlighted by the response of Shem and Japheth, who, “took a garment, laid it on both their shoulders, and walked backward and covered the nakedness of their father. Their faces were turned backward, and they did not see their father’s nakedness” (Gen. 9:23). Their response was one marked with modesty and concern for the exposure of their father. The second issue is that, in his inaction, Ham went and talked about it with his brothers. Rather than doing something about the problem, he just went and talked about it. There is room to make a modern application here. The temptation in our modern

world is to talk about other people's problems rather than trying to help them. The punishment for such behavior in this insistence is swift and harsh, which once again reinforces the importance of modesty.

Generational Consequences

The close of chapter 9 highlights the generational consequences from the way Shem, Ham, and Japheth handle this nakedness incident. There are a couple of surprising details in this first pronouncement. Of course, Ham is the only of the three brothers to receive a curse and not a blessing. The first surprising detail is the fact that Noah speaks! Noah has weathered a corrupt world (figuratively speaking), built an ark, weathered a storm (literally speaking), seen everyone die, cared for all of the animals, and just now are the first recorded words of him. The second surprising detail is that the curse is pronounced not on Ham, but Canaan. Why is the son of Ham receiving the penalty? Many suggestions have been made to answer this perplexing question. Of the most popular suggestions is that this is an example of Lex Talionis (Lt., "law of retaliation"). That the youngest son of Noah transgressed, the eye for an eye principle would suggest that the youngest son of Ham would pay the penalty. This is certainly a possibility. Lex Talionis was a reality of the ancient near eastern world.

There is however another, perhaps simpler, reason. The author of the Genesis account is traditionally held to be Moses. That the Torah is for God's people after Moses' era is virtually uncontested. The relationship between the Israelites and the Canaanites was long and detailed. It is possible that Ham was the recipient of such a generational curse, but since Canaan is the one in whom the people are named after, Canaan is mentioned here to make a point about why Israel's relationship with Canaan is the way it is. Noah says, "Cursed be Canaan; a servant of servants shall he be to his brothers" (Gen. 9:25). Shem's line eventually brings about Abram to whom the covenants are given. Israel finds its identity, therefore, in Shem. Japheth is the father of the Gentiles. Canaan will serve both of them and be overtaken by one of them. Israel eventually will take the land that the Canaanites populated.

There is one final detail worth mentioning in this passage and that is the recipient of the blessing. Noah curses Ham, and one would expect the blessing to then go to Shem, but it actually is directed towards Yahweh. Verse 26 says, "He also said, 'Blessed be the LORD, the God of Shem; and let Canaan be his servant.'" The significance of this cannot be missed. Even though Shem is positioned in a seemingly exalted position, he is subordinate to God in his elevated place. Ultimately, Shem will be blessed because his God is Yahweh.

Study Questions

Day One

1. Read Genesis 9:1-4; 7. What did God mandate for Noah and his descendants after the flood? How did the relationship between humanity and animals differ after the flood? What was the purpose of this relational change and who did it serve to protect?

2. Read Genesis 9:5-6. What is the punishment given for murder after the flood? What is this punishment based off of?

Day Two

1. Read Genesis 9:8-17. What was the covenant promise that God made to Noah? What was the sign of the covenant? What was the purpose of the sign?

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2. Read Genesis 9:18-19. Who were the three sons of Noah? Who was the son of Ham? What was their significance?
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Day Three

1. Read Genesis 9:20-23. In your own words, describe the events that took place in this passage. What is the problem that is highlighted in this passage? What does Ham do? What does Shem and Japheth do?

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2. Read Genesis 9:24-25. What is Noah's response to Ham? What does he do? What is the significance of this curse?
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Day Four

1. Read Genesis 9:26-27. Who does Noah bless? Who are the descendants of Shem? Who are the descendants of Japheth? (Hint: See above)

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2. Read Genesis 9:28-29. How many years did Noah live after the flood? How old was Noah when he died?
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Week 7 Discussion: Modesty Matters

Genesis 9:20-23 highlight the importance of modesty in Old Testament living. Nakedness is something that is to be covered from other people, save for the context of marriage. In the modern world, however, modesty is a lost art. Our definition of what is modest and what is risqué has changed quite dramatically. Talk as a group about the benefits of modesty and how the way that we present ourselves impacts our witness for Christ.

1. Icebreaker: What comes to mind when someone says the word, "modesty?" Is it positive or negative?
2. Is modesty still important in our modern context? Why or why not?
3. How does the way we dress affect the way people respond to us? Think about different contexts: business, church, school, and discuss how we present ourselves positively or negatively affects the way people respond to what we are doing or saying.
4. Is modesty the goal of Christian living, or the result of Christian believing? In other words, does the way a Christian dress define the disposition of the heart, or reveal it?

5. How important is the topic of modesty to our youth? How should this topic be presented? With law or grace?
6. What is the point of modesty? What purpose does it serve?

Takeaways:

1. God promised to never again flood the world, and delivered a sign of this covenant he made with Noah.
2. The international relations between Israel, Canaan, and Gentiles was affected by the actions of Shem, Ham, and Japheth.

PRAYER REQUESTS: