

God's Care for and Covenant With Noah

Genesis 8:1-9:17

Focus Verse

"I establish my covenant with you: Never again will all life be destroyed by the waters of a flood; never again will there be a flood to destroy the earth." – Genesis 9:11

- God Remembered Noah – Genesis 8
- God Reassured Noah – Genesis 9:1-17

Engage

Have you ever had to adjust to a "new normal"? Parents adjust to a new normal when their children leave home to establish life on their own. Employees adjust to a new normal when they transition to retirement. Families are forced to adjust to a new normal when they lose a loved one. Unexpected pain or difficulty often takes life on an undesired path. **Any new or unfamiliar situation – a new job, a new city, a new relationship – requires adjusting to a new normal.** It can be difficult.

In Genesis 8 and 9, Noah had to adjust to a new normal. Noah and his family found themselves lone survivors of the greatest act of destruction the world has ever seen. Their friends and neighbors were gone. What did life look like moving forward? As Noah faced his new normal, God proved He is faithful. God faithfully remembered Noah and reassured him of His unfailing love. He established a covenant with Noah, promising to never again destroy the earth by flood. Noah believed God. Believers can experience genuine hope because of God's unchanging faithfulness. **God-given faith trusts His character, will and Word.** How will you trust God to faithfully care for you this week?

God Remembered Noah – Genesis 8

The Waters Receded – 8:1-5

God's judgment rained down on humanity for 40 days and 40 nights. The floodwaters remained for another 110 days. For several months, Noah remained adrift on the endless world sea. God promised to keep Noah safe from death but did not tell Noah how long he must remain in the ark. As the days passed, Noah must have questioned whether God would remain true to His promise. Would God indeed save him? Or would God forget and abandon him to the floodwaters? Genesis 8:1 offers a ray of hope. "But God remembered Noah and all the wild animals and the livestock that were with him in the ark...."

What does it mean that God remembered? When people remember, they recall something previously forgotten or put out of their minds. God is omniscient, knowing everything. The statement "God remembered" is an example of anthropomorphism, a figure of speech that ascribes finite human traits to the infinite God. These figures of speech are found throughout the Bible and help us better understand God's work from a human perspective. The statement "God remembered"

emphasizes the faithfulness and everlasting care of God. Throughout the Bible, some action or work of God on behalf of His people follows this phrase. Genesis 8 is no different. **God took action to fulfill His promise to Noah.** He made the waters recede.

The Earth Was Dry – 8:6-14

Through God, Moses recorded dates related to the Flood. **God either confirmed dates handed down through generations or revealed these specifics directly to Moses as he wrote the Genesis account.** These dates were significant to Moses' original audience, the Israelites. God's people related to a new beginning because they had experienced it. Through the Exodus from bondage in Egypt, they had been protected from judgment through faithful obedience to God in the Passover. God's miraculous power overturned the power of nature, evil, false gods and wicked rulers¹ to give them a new beginning in the promised land. This same pattern appears again and again – God faithfully judges sin but promises deliverance and new hope for new life through faith in Him.

After Noah saw the tops of the mountains for 40 days, he sent out birds to test the water level on the earth. Noah used his intellect, experience and the birds that God provided. Noah needed to know that the land beyond his view could produce the vegetation needed to support life.

The dates recorded confirm that God's almighty power caused the water to recede and plants to regrow quickly. He can accomplish what is impossible for people to imagine. **God covered the earth with water and then uncovered the transformed earth by His command.** When the last dove did not return, Noah knew the water had dried up sufficiently to inhabit the earth again. Yet, Noah faithfully waited until God told him to come out with his family and all the animals.

Noah Came Out of the Ark – 8:15-22

God faithfully keeps His promises. God preserved a remnant of His image-bearing people and the animals. After months of safety in the ark, Noah and his family came out, followed by God's creatures, one kind after another. Picture the procession of people and animals coming out of the ark onto dry land. Imagine what it felt like to view the sky, feel the warmth of the sun and walk the open space after so many long months. God delivered them safely and blessed them greatly.

Noah obeyed God – 8:15-19

Noah had God-given faith that produced dependence on God and courageous obedience. He obediently built and entered the ark because He trusted God to keep His promises. Now, he exercised his faith to exit the ark in obedience to God's command, "Come out of the ark ... so Noah came out" Noah also obeyed God's call to work. Noah brought out the animals under God's renewed blessing to be fruitful and increase on the earth.

Noah worshipped God – 8:20

Like astronauts or explorers who plant a national flag on the ground they claim, **Noah's altar declared that the earth and everything in it belonged to the Lord.** Noah's love and reverence for God laid the foundation for his faith. He expressed gratitude to God by making worship his first priority.

As soon as he cared for the creatures, Noah offered the first recorded offering since Cain and Abel. He sacrificed some of the clean animals and clean birds from the ark as burnt offerings. Noah did not express his worship in a convenient or self-determined way, but followed God's prescribed plan. Noah knew God's expectations regarding acceptable worship, though we do not know how God instructed him.

Noah's appropriate sacrifice on an altar pleased the Lord. God had instructed Noah to gather both "clean" and "unclean" animals to enter the ark, with more clean animals than the single pairs of other species. (Compare Genesis 6:19-20 with 7:2-3.) Moses' original audience understood the significance of clean and unclean animals. They knew what God judged as appropriate for sacrifices and to eat as food. God faithfully provided for worship through sacrifice.

Noah pleased God – 8:21-22

Noah's altar revealed his heart of devotion to God, and it pleased the Lord. The Bible again uses a beautiful picture, another anthropomorphism, to reveal how intimately God relates to us through worship. "The LORD smelled the pleasing aroma" of the sacrifice. This phrase describes human sensations of satisfaction and joy to help us understand God's delight in those whose acts of faith please Him. This phrase, first used here, appears commonly through the first five books of the Bible, all written by Moses. Most often, it reflects God's response to worship and sacrifices of clean, unblemished animals as a covering for sin.²

The necessity of substitutionary blood sacrifice foreshadows the ultimate sacrifice of Jesus Christ on the cross. Worship involves far more than habits or rituals. God sees the heart attitude within each worshipper. God based His response to the offerings of Cain and Abel on their hearts. God saw and was pleased with Noah's heart of grateful sacrifice reflected in worship and obedience. Later, Paul's letter to the Ephesians encourages believers to wholehearted devotion by offering faithful deeds to God after the example of Christ as a "fragrant offering and sacrifice" to God.³

Verse 21 offers insight into God's thoughts at this pivotal point in human history. God "said in his heart" He would never again destroy all living creatures, "even though every inclination of the human heart is evil from childhood." **The Flood cleansed the earth from wicked people but did not remove the sin nature born within every human.** Those in the ark had been saved from that judgment, but Noah, his family and all humanity would continue to sin.

God remains faithful, even though humans persist in rebellion against Him. The Flood warns of God's just judgment which is required because God cannot overlook the offense of sin.⁴ But God qualifies the delay of judgment: "as long as the earth endures." Until then, the seasons, cold, heat, day and night provide faithful reminders of God's mercy and grace. **Although all people deserve judgment, we live and breathe because of God's love, grace, mercy and faithfulness to keep His promises.**

The Doctrine of Faith

Hebrews 11:1 defines faith: “Now faith is confidence in what we hope for and assurance about what we do not see.” True faith places confidence in God’s character and offers assurance that He will do what He has promised. **Salvation comes as a gift of God, by grace through faith, not from ourselves.** We have no reason to boast (Ephesians 2:8-10). God gives people the gift of faith that leads them to repent of sin and trust in the sacrifice and righteousness of Jesus Christ. Saving faith requires humility regarding self and reverence toward God. “And without faith it is impossible to please God, because anyone who comes to him must believe that he exists and that he rewards those who earnestly seek him” (Hebrews 11:6).

God the Holy Spirit graciously gives sinners saving faith. No one can do anything to earn or deserve this gift. Saving faith involves three elements:

- **Content** – specific belief in the claims of the gospel for salvation (John 1:12; 3:16; Acts 4:12; 16:31). Noah believed what God had promised. He believed what God had revealed at that point in redemptive history about sin, judgment, salvation and hope for new life.
- Personal, loving **trust** in Jesus Christ, the Savior, who first loved us (John 6:37; 1 John 4:9-10). In Noah’s day, the promised Savior was yet to come. Yet Noah believed God’s promise to save His followers from sin and judgment. God declared Noah righteous through faith. Noah’s worship pleased God, and their relationship confirmed Noah’s personal trust.
- Commitment to **repent and follow** Jesus Christ (Luke 9:23; 14:25-27; Acts 3:19; 20:21; Romans 12:1-2). God’s covenant with Noah looked forward to the future person and work of Jesus Christ. Noah demonstrated that He accepted and applied God’s Word by building and entering the ark. But Noah and his family were saved from the Flood by God, not Noah’s efforts. God shut Noah safely in the ark, saving him from death and giving him new life through faith, another picture of Jesus.

The writer of Hebrews commended Noah for living by faith. Noah believed God and obeyed God in “holy fear” (Hebrews 11:7). **A life of obedience and worship gives evidence of saving faith.** Mere intellectual agreement to the gospel does not bring salvation. The demons have this kind of faith but are not saved. To know *about* Jesus is not the same thing as to enjoy personal relationship with Him (John 14:21-24; 1 John 1:5-10; 2 John 1:6). Biblical faith trusts God’s faithfulness and promises even when we do not understand all He is doing.

Faith in anything but God can lead to pride and prejudice against others. **Without faith in God alone, you have no choice but to rely on your own logic, personal experiences and human explanations to find meaning in this world and in this life.** Your search for freedom, fulfillment and answers is limited to the people, places, things and pleasures of this world. How do you expect your career, hobbies, intellect, friends or marriage to satisfy your deep longings?

True faith in God changes everything in this life and for eternity. When I trust completely in the finished work of Christ, I can stop expecting that I can please God merely by managing my behavior and trying to be good. My desire and ability to please God depends on His power, not my own. I can rest, knowing my salvation is not something I can earn or mess up. My life has purpose because I know God loves me with an everlasting love. Life on earth is not a meaningless journey, but the first steps toward a joyful eternity in the presence of my Creator. Believing God puts me in a safe place. He knows completely what I know only in part. God is worthy of my complete trust. Faith can grasp what the mind cannot fully explain.

God Reassured Noah – Genesis 9:1-17

God preserved Noah's family in the ark. Now, He gave instructions and promises for how they were to live. **God provided a covenant and sign as a testimony of His faithfulness.**

Five Commands – 9:1-7

Following the judgment of the Flood, God blessed humanity with five commands:

- **Be fruitful and fill the earth** – God repeated twice His creation command first given to Adam and Eve, emphasizing His priority and plan for marriage, family and society.
- **Rule over the animal world** – The relationship between animals and people changed, as evidence of sin's corruption. Loving supremacy and gentle shepherding were replaced by fear and dread.
- **Permission to eat meat** – Now, God allowed animals to be eaten.
- **Refrain from eating blood** – In Scripture, blood represents life, the gift of God, and requires proper respect.
- **Capital punishment** – God upheld the sacredness of human life made in His image. God declares justice against murder by establishing human government when He announced, "by humans shall their blood be shed."

The Promise of the Covenant – 9:8-11

God will never again destroy the earth and all life with a flood. He demonstrated His compassion for people with a public promise now called the Noahic Covenant. This unconditional covenant does not

depend on people's obedience for its fulfillment. God will fulfill the covenant because He is faithful to His Word, a source of comfort and hope for all creation.

The Sign of the Covenant – 9:12-17

Covenants usually have a physical sign as a reminder of the promise. Wedding rings represent the marriage covenants in many cultures. **God designed the rainbow as the sign of the Noahic Covenant.** This beautiful sign affirms His power over creation. He brings rain clouds and sets rainbows in place, visible signs of His mercy on our sinful condition. All generations have witnessed the rainbow God sets in place to comfort and warn sinners. God patiently offers grace and mercy until His day of final judgment comes. On that day, His judgment will fall on those who have lived in opposition to Him and His commands.

What do you remember about God when you see a rainbow? The brightness of the rainbow declares the steadfast goodness and glory of God. God made and governs His creation. God remains present and intimately involved in shaping creation for His purposes. In wisdom, God brings about all life and knows how events relate to His plans. We can trust Him to perfectly judge all things. He is worthy to be praised!

The Flood warns of God's right and power to judge. Adam and Eve's sin spread into every person and place on earth. Although sin deserves one flood after another, God promised to never again bring worldwide devastation in that way. When rainbows appear, those who trust God can rejoice. His patience, mercy and grace bring comfort to those who know, love and trust Him. Believers live by faith in God's faithfulness. **God-given faith trusts in His character, will and Word.**

Take to Heart

Hold Fast

Long before Moses wrote Genesis, stories recounting the events from God's creation to the Flood were shared and handed down from generation to generation. Genesis 1-9 records what God wanted the post-Exodus generations to remember. God's creation was destroyed by humanity's sin, bringing His holy judgment through the Flood. But God offered salvation to Noah and his family. The familiar pattern of God's promise to judge sin but also to offer salvation

through faith continues throughout Scripture.

People everywhere can know, trust and praise our faithful God, who creates and sustains all life for His glory.

The account of Noah displays the pattern of faith that experiences victory over sin: trust, wait, obey and praise.

- **Noah trusted God.** He looked out through the opening of the ark into a changed world, a new normal.

- **Noah waited on God.** The Bible does not record any doubts or complaints about his time in the ark.
- **Noah obeyed God.** Noah, his family and the animals came out only after God's command.
- **Noah praised God.** He stepped into a world marked by just judgment, yet with signs of God's grace everywhere; he then built an altar to worship God.

Whether or not Noah had previously seen a rainbow, God made it the sign of His covenant, representing His faithfulness. God gave the rainbow special meaning for Noah's descendants, including us. We usually see only half of God's "rainbow in the clouds." However, the

prophet Ezekiel and the apostle John saw the full circle of the rainbow in their visions of God's glory.⁵ **When we see God face-to-face, we will behold the full circle of glory in His person and work.** In that day, "The upright see and rejoice, but all the wicked shut their mouths. Let the one who is wise heed these things and ponder the loving deeds of the Lord."⁶

Noah's faith pleased God. Noah had faith even without full sight of God's plan for redemption through His Son, Jesus Christ. Now we know that Jesus Christ, Son of God and Son of Man, came to earth, lived a righteous life and died in our place for our sin. He is resurrected from the dead and will return as King forever. God keeps His promises.

Apply It

God sustained Noah and his family through the Flood and their time in the ark. Surely those months seemed long as the boat bobbed on the waves and the waters began to recede. As Noah waited, he must have longed for release from the confines, noises and smells of the ark. We do not naturally enjoy waiting. Even steps of obedience to God often involve waiting. **God is at work as we wait.** God remembered Noah, his family and the animals. God caused the waters to recede and life-giving plants to spring up on the renewed earth. When the ark came to rest on a mountain, Noah opened a window, probably squinting as the first beam of sunlight shined in his eyes. Waiting on God to bring the full answer to His promises develops your faith. What are you waiting for? Are you waiting for a clear answer, a firm direction, a release or solution? Can you trust that God remembers you, even while you wait? Can you praise God, even if you cannot see His answer? God can be trusted.

We find security and a sense of stability in the familiar. However, life takes us on a continual journey into new things, new places, new experiences and new challenges. Noah survived the trauma of the Flood. But emerging from the ark, his first steps on the flood-drenched earth forced him to face the new and unfamiliar. God

met him with hope and assurance. Noah expressed gratitude to God, and God set the rainbow in the sky to seal His promise. Is God calling you to a new place? Can you honestly express your fears and specifically trust a promise in His Word? If your past involves trauma or difficult memories, will you trust God to bring hope and redeem your pain for His glory? **God takes us beyond the comfortable and familiar, sometimes removing all options except trusting Him.** In those moments, we exercise the muscles of faith and experience that God is faithful. How is God meeting you in your "new normal"?

Noah's response to God's faithfulness was worship. He offered animal sacrifices to God – an act of worship and dependence on God to cover he and his family's sins. He humbly and gratefully acknowledged God's faithfulness to deliver him and his family from death. Noah's worship rose to God as a "pleasing aroma." Worship pleases God. Worship attests to God's worthiness and expresses your gratitude for the sufficiency of Christ's sacrifice. God seeks true worshippers who worship Him in the Spirit and in truth.⁷ True worshippers offer their humbled and surrendered souls before our God. True worshippers align their hearts and minds to the truth God has declared in His Word

and by His Holy Spirit. We can worship God in joy or sorrow, in wealth or poverty, in need or abundance. Consider how you can worship God in your current situation. How will you honor God's worthiness and faithfulness in your life?

"The prospects are as bright as the promises of God." This quote, spoken by missionary Adoniram Judson in the midst of intense suffering, captures well the message of the rainbow. God hung the rainbow in the sky as an intentional reminder of His promise to never again destroy the earth with a flood. **Every promise in God's Word will be fulfilled someday, even if we do not experience the complete fulfillment now.** Faith in God grows when you trust Him in specific ways based on what He has declared to be true. 2 Corinthians 1:20 says it well: "For no matter how many promises God has made, they are 'Yes' in Christ. And so through him the 'Amen' is spoken by us to the glory of God." What is your greatest need today? What promise will you believe as you surrender your need to God and trust His timing to bring it to pass? Does your faith echo "yes" and "amen" to a specific promise in God's Word? Your prospects are bright because God's promises are true!

Check out these footnoted references for further study of God's Word in this week's lesson.

- 1: **God's miraculous power:** Exodus 1-14
- 2: **Pleasing aroma:** Exodus 29:18; Leviticus 1:9, 17; Numbers 15:3
- 3: **Fragrant offering:** Ephesians 5:2
- 4: **Judgment:** Isaiah 34:1-4; 2 Peter 3:3-13
- 5: **Rainbow:** Ezekiel 1:28; Revelation 4:3
- 6: **See God face-to-face:** Psalm 107:42-43
- 7: **Spirit and truth:** John 4:24