

God's Promise to Noah

Genesis 9:12 And God said: “This is the sign of the covenant which I make between Me and you, and every living creature that is with you, for perpetual generations: :13 I set My rainbow in the cloud, and it shall be for the sign of the covenant between Me and the earth.

Genesis 9:14 It shall be, when I bring a cloud over the earth, that the rainbow shall be seen in the cloud; :15 and I will remember My covenant which is between Me and you and every living creature of all flesh; the waters shall never again become a flood to destroy all flesh. :16 The rainbow shall be in the cloud, and I will look on it to remember the everlasting covenant between God and every living creature of all flesh that is on the earth.” :17 And God said to Noah, “This is the sign of the covenant which I have established between Me and all flesh that is on the earth.” 9

As God begins to spell out the terms of the covenant that He will make with Noah and his descendants, the God of all mercy makes sure that Noah understands that this covenant also affects all the animals that were with him in the ark. 19

The Flood did not change the character of mankind, nor did it return him to the position of innocence which he enjoyed before the Fall. 29

But it was a warning to man that God will not tolerate sin and whenever man chooses to sin, divine judgment soon follows. 39

Yet never again will that judgment be in the form of a universal, globe-encircling flood. 49

As a sign of this covenant God determines: **I do set my bow in the cloud, and it shall be for a token of a covenant between me and the earth.** As Yahweh further explains why the rainbow is so important as a token of the covenant, He says, **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.** This is obviously an anthropomorphism, a figure designed to enable man to identify with God's faultless memory. 59

Calvin notes that it is introduced to remind man that God is ever-faithful to His covenant engagements. 69

God needs no prompting of His memory; the rainbow is there to assure us at the end of every rainstorm that God has held His covenant in remembrance. 79

Each time we see a rainbow we ought to delight afresh in the faithfulness of our God (cf. Lam 3:21–23). 89

The word for bow usually means a weapon. Thus, “the recurring rainbow imposed on the retreating storm by the shining again of the sun is God's battle bow laid aside, a token of grace staying the lightning-shafts of wrath” (Kline, *Genesis*, p. 90). 99

Noah and His Family

Genesis 9:18 Now the sons of Noah who went out of the ark were Shem, Ham, and Japheth. And Ham was the father of Canaan. :19 These three were the sons of Noah, and from these the whole earth was populated.

Genesis 9:20 And Noah began to be a farmer, and he planted a vineyard.

Genesis 9:21 Then he drank of the wine and was drunk, and became uncovered in his tent.

Genesis 9:22 And Ham, the father of Canaan, saw the nakedness of his father, and told his two brothers outside.

Genesis 9:23 But Shem and Japheth took a garment, laid it on both their shoulders, and went backward and covered the nakedness of their father. Their faces were turned away, and they did not see their father's nakedness.

Genesis 9:24 So Noah awoke from his wine, and knew what his younger son had done to him. :25 Then he said: “Cursed be Canaan; A servant of servants He shall be to his brethren.” 6

When he **awoke**, **Noah** pronounced a curse on **Canaan**. The question arises, “Why did the curse fall on **Canaan** instead of **Ham**?” One possible explanation is that the evil tendency which was manifested in **Ham** was even more pronounced in **Canaan**. 16

The curse was thus a prophecy of his immoral conduct and its fitting punishment. 26

Another explanation is that Canaan himself committed some vulgar act against his grandfather, and that Noah later became aware of it. 36

Noah **knew what his younger son had done to him**. It may be that verse 24 refers to Canaan as Noah’s *youngest grandson*, rather than to Ham as his *younger son*. In the Bible, “son” often means “grandson” or other descendant. 46

In this event, **Canaan** was not **cursed** for his father’s sin, but for his own. 56

Yet another possibility is that God’s grace allowed Noah to curse only a small segment of Ham’s descendants and not a possible third of the human race.66

Genesis 9:26 And he said: “Blessed be the Lord, The God of Shem, And may Canaan be his servant. :27 May God enlarge Japheth, And may he dwell in the tents of Shem; And may Canaan be his servant.” :28 And Noah lived after the flood three hundred and fifty years. :29 So all the days of Noah were nine hundred and fifty years; and he died.2

Canaan was cursed to serve **Shem** and **Japheth**. The Canaanites’ servitude to the Israelites may be seen in Joshua 9:23 and Judges 1:28. This passage has been used to suggest the slavery of the black people, but there is absolutely no support for this view. Canaan was the ancestor of the Canaanites, who dwelt in the Holy Land before Israel arrived. There is no evidence that they were black people. **Shem** and **Japheth** were blessed with dominion. Verse 27 may suggest Japheth’s sharing in spiritual blessings through Shem’s descendants, the Israelites.12

There is a dispute as to whether Shem or Japheth was the oldest son of Noah. Chapter 10:21 may read “Shem the brother of Japheth the elder” or “Shem ... the older brother of Japheth” (NKJV marg.). The latter is the preferred reading. Shem appears first in the genealogies of Genesis 5:32 and 1 Chronicles 1:4.22

The Tower of Babel

Genesis 11:1 Now the whole earth had one language and one speech.

Genesis 11:2 And it came to pass, as they journeyed from the east, that they found a plain in the land of Shinar, and they dwelt there. :3 Then they said to one another, “Come, let us make bricks and bake them thoroughly.” They had brick for stone, and they had asphalt for mortar. :4 And they said, “Come, let us build ourselves a city, and a tower whose top is in the heavens; let us make a name for ourselves, lest we be scattered abroad over the face of the whole earth.”3

In chapter 10, which *chronologically* comes *after* chapter 11, mankind was divided according to languages (vv. 5, 20, 31). Now we learn the cause of the divisions. Instead of dispersing over the earth, as God intended, men built **a city and a tower** in **Shinar** (Babylon). 13

So it was a policy of pride (to **make a name** for themselves) and defiance (to avoid being **scattered**).23

To us the **tower** may also picture fallen man’s ceaseless effort to reach heaven by his own works instead of receiving salvation as a free gift of grace.33

Genesis 11:5 But the Lord came down to see the city and the tower which the sons of men had built.

Genesis 11:6 And the Lord said, “Indeed the people are one and they all have one language, and this is what they begin to do; now nothing that they propose to do will be withheld from them.