

Biblical Theology, Lesson 6

The Noahic Covenant

Genesis 1-11 tells the story of beginnings. God created a good world, and then he made human beings as his representatives to rule over it for his glory. He placed these human beings (Adam and Eve) in the Garden of Eden, which was his special dwelling place, where he gave them a task: to protect, cultivate, and ultimately expand the garden throughout the whole earth. God had a plan to cover the whole creation with his blessing and dwell with human beings in a perfect world forever.

Sadly, Adam and Eve did not obey. Tempted by the devil (through a snake), they ate the fruit of a tree that God had told them not to eat, and the result of their rebellion was getting driven out of God's presence in the garden. Away from his presence, they were destined to die. Because they sinned, as we saw in Genesis 3, they fell under God's wrath, they were kicked out of the Garden, the world was cursed, and all human beings since then have inherited a sinful nature and all of sin's consequences.

I. Sinful Humanity Deserves Destruction Under God's Judgment

And this is exactly what we see played out in Genesis 4-6. Adam and Eve are "fruitful" and they "multiply," just as God told them to do before the fall. But their descendants do not rightly image God anymore - they are full of sin, with evil hearts, and they fill the earth with wickedness.

Gen. 6:5-7: "The LORD saw that the wickedness of man was great in the earth, and that every intention of the thoughts of his heart was only evil continually. And the LORD regretted that he had made man on the earth, and it grieved him to his heart. So the LORD said, "I will blot out man whom I have created from the face of the land, man and animals and creeping and birds of the heavens, for I am sorry that I have made them."

Mankind was made in the image of God and spread out over the earth. But instead of filling the earth with a representation of God, with His glory and blessing, the earth was instead filled with sin and wickedness. Humanity lived in rebellion against God, living in sin and all of its consequences; after the fall, humanity lives under God's wrath. God is a good, just, and holy God. We are wicked and sinful. SO the right response from a holy and just God is to bring *judgment and destruction on the wicked*. Now, we might instinctively recoil against the thought of God pouring out wrath and destruction on all humanity. But if we stop and think about it for a second, all of us intuitively know that *it is good* for wickedness to be dealt with in just judgment. My son is only four years old, yet he already knows that it would be wrong for the bad guy to win and get away with doing bad things; he knows that a good story is one where the good guy, the hero, wins and saves the day, by defeating the bad guy. This principle is true: for real salvation from bad things to come, there has to be judgment and justice done to the wicked.

And so, this is exactly what God did. He sent a flood over the whole earth, to wipe out wicked humanity from the face of the earth, even to wipe out fallen animals and creatures, since they too have been corrupted by the fall (after all, lions and bears didn't eat people or other animals before the Fall). God was cleansing the world, bringing about justice, and making things right.

But God did not give up on humanity or his creation. Even in the midst of judgment, *God showed mercy on humanity*.

II. God's Covenant with Sinful Humanity Restored Through Noah

As we saw last week, in Genesis 3:15, right after the Fall, God made a promise that one day, he would send an offspring of humanity to take on the snake

(the devil) and defeat him, removing his power from humanity and establishing human beings as rulers in his creation again. The rest of the Bible shows how God has fulfilled that promise. And so I said last time that we can track with that story in Genesis by looking for the promised “offspring” who would come from Adam and Eve - one who would be a second and better Adam. And the genealogy of Adam and Eve, in Genesis 5, helps us track that, and leads us to a man named Noah.

Then, right after GOD’s declaration of judgment against wicked humanity that we just read, we then see in Gen. 6:8, “But Noah found favor in the eyes of the LORD.” Noah “walked with God” (Gen.6:9). Even though he was a sinner like everyone else, he still loved and worshipped GOD; he trusted God and wanted to obey Him. And God spared Noah and his family from the flood of God’s wrath against humanity.

Noah and his sons build a giant boat - Noah’s Ark - just as God tells him to. Then, in Gen. 7, God’s promised judgment comes - He sends a flood over the whole earth, wiping out sinful humanity. Yet, God’s promise of salvation for Noah and His family holds true - they are safe and sound in the boat, along with two of every kind of animal!

What we see here is that GOD *shows mercy* on sinful humanity and His fallen creation. He didn’t have to spare them. It’s not like Noah and his family were sinless - they deserved God’s wrath too. But God *showed mercy*, out of His grace. Here we see God’s heart: holy and just, and at the exact same time, full of love, mercy, and grace. These things are not contradictory.

And we see this culminating in GOD’s covenant that he makes with all of humanity through Noah, the new head of humanity, after the flood subsides.

Gen. 8:20- The LORD said, “I will never again curse the ground because of man, for the intention of man’s heart is evil from his youth. Neither will I ever again

strike down every living creature as I have done. While the earth remains, seedtime and harvest, cold and heat, summer and winter, day and night, shall not cease.’

In other words, God is promising that, even though humanity deserves to be wiped out completely, He will show mercy, and allow sinful humanity to continue living on this earth. This doesn’t mean we live forever; nor does it mean that there won’t be a judgment day. But it *does* mean that the very fact that we are still living on this earth, despite the wickedness and evil and suffering that humanity has produced over thousands of years, is *evidence of God’s mercy*.

God promises his mercy in allowing sinful humanity to continue to live by *making a covenant* with Noah. *Gen. 9:9-11*, “Behold, I establish my covenant with you and your offspring after you, and with every living creature that is with you, the birds and the livestock and every beast of the earth... I establish my covenant with you, that never again shall all flesh be cut off by the waters of the flood, and never again shall there be a flood to destroy the earth.” God gives us the *rainbow* as a sign of his covenant with humanity in verses 12-17.

This is the first time we see the word “covenant” used in scripture. But as we talked about a few weeks ago, we see the idea of a covenant of works established between God and humanity in Genesis 1-2. Even though Adam and Eve broke God’s covenant, here God is restoring a covenant with humanity. Only this time is different; humanity is still fallen, they aren’t God’s special people in the same way, they don’t live in paradise in God’s place, and they aren’t promised eternal life. They do, however, get to keep living in this world, despite sin. And this covenant isn’t based on what humanity does; it’s based on God’s promise, making it unconditional. So we don’t live under the covenant of works anymore, and do not rightly image God in our sinful humanity, and yet, *we still are in the image of God*, even in our brokenness. And so, God restores His command to humanity,: “Be

fruitful and multiply and fill the earth”, and tells us to respect and honor the life of human beings as special and sacred, even after the Fall, since we are all still made in the image of God (Gen. 9:1-7).

So what we see here is that Noah is like a “second Adam” in the story, a new start for the human race. God made a special promise to his creation after he flooded the earth and started again with Noah: he would not destroy the earth again in this way, but would preserve it so that his story of redemption could play out.

But as the story continues in Gen. 9-11, we see that Noah isn’t the promised offspring who crushes Satan and fully restores humanity. He still sins, too, and so do his descendants. We see progress made in our story of redemption, but we haven’t arrived at the climax yet: at this point in the story, we’re still waiting for the true hero, the true second and better Adam to come and restore fallen humanity: Jesus Christ.

So next time, we’ll pick up our story with another “offspring,” a man named Abraham, and see another covenant God makes to finally bring His promised blessings to all the earth.