

Genesis 6:18–22; 7:1–5 — With Thee Will I Establish My Covenant

The Covenant with Noah, Covenants of Promise vs. Negative Covenant, Going In, Clean and Unclean, and Separation as a Principle

Scripture Reading: Genesis 6:18–22; 7:1–5; Ephesians 2:11–12

“But with thee will I establish my covenant; and thou shalt come into the ark, thou, and thy sons, and thy wife, and thy sons’ wives with thee.”

*“And Noah did according unto all that the LORD commanded him.”
(Genesis 7:5)*

The Covenant with Noah: Not a Covenant of Promise

But with thee will I establish my covenant. This is the second covenant in Genesis, the first being the one-sided covenant with Adam in the garden (Hosea 6:7: they like Adam have transgressed the covenant). What is the character of God’s covenant with Noah? Ephesians 2:12 gives a helpful test. It says that the Gentiles were strangers from the covenants of promise. Noah’s covenant with its rainbow sign is not one the Gentiles have been strangers to — every nation has seen rainbows, and God’s promise not to destroy the earth again by flood is a covenant they have known and benefited from.

The covenants of promise — the Abrahamic, the Davidic, the New Covenant — are all covenants of positive promise: something is being given, bequeathed, bestowed. They involve a giving. The covenant with Noah is different: it is a covenant of negative promise. God promises not to destroy the earth again by flood. There is no positive bestowal of a new blessing; there is a constraint on

judgment. That is why it is not numbered among the covenants of promise in Ephesians 2. The law, too, is excluded from those covenants — the law took up the promises on condition of man's obedience, and that conditionality removes it from the category of promise. The covenants of promise are all unconditional and entirely dependent on God's sovereign action.

With Noah a new headship begins. He is the bottleneck through whom the entire human race subsequently flows. Government is given to him — the sword, the ordering of human society under divine sanction. He is a fresh head for the present earth, and the covenant is established with him in that position. The rainbow in the cloud is the sign of it — not a human instrument of judgment (the bow belongs to warfare) but God's bow, now laid down and pointed upward, the sign that judgment by flood is past and will not recur until the present heavens and earth are dissolved by fire.

Come Thou Into the Ark: The Emphasis on Going In

From verse 18 of chapter 6 through chapter 7, there is a sustained and repeated emphasis on going into the ark. Come thou and all thy house into the ark (7:1). They shall come unto thee (6:20). Thou shalt come into the ark (6:18). And in chapter 7: Noah went in (v.7), there went in two and two (v.9), in the selfsame day entered Noah (v.13), and they that went in went in (v.16). It is said over and over. Some have imagined this repetition proves multiple documentary sources stitched together. But any writer who wants to make absolutely certain a point is not missed repeats it. The emphasis on going in is itself the lesson. If Noah had stayed outside, everything would have been different. If a single son had declined to enter, he would have perished.

The word go has a separative power. To enter the ark was to leave the whole world behind. The world that then was — all that men had built and made and loved and clung to — was left outside. This is the first great instance of the

separation principle in Scripture, between the righteous and those who perished. It gathers momentum as history proceeds: Abraham is called out of Ur with a threefold separation — from his country, his kindred, and his father's house. Then Israel is set apart from all the nations of the earth. These things start here in seed form and grow.

Noah and Jonah: Two Men in Two Boats

The contrast between Noah and Jonah illuminates both. Thus did Noah, according to all that God commanded him, so did he. What higher commendation is possible? Of Jonah the opposite must be said: according to all that God commanded Jonah, Jonah did not do it — and that is how he ended up in his boat. Noah entered the ark in obedience; Jonah fled in disobedience. Noah came out of the ark by the opening of the door, stepping out onto the mountain where the ark had rested. Jonah came out of the fish being vomited onto the dry land. One exit was dignified and full of purpose; the other was abrupt and ignominious. Yet God's purposes prevailed in both cases, and Jonah too became a vessel of God's grace to Nineveh. Obedience is always the better path.

For Thee Have I Seen Righteous: The Singular

In 7:1 the Lord says, for thee have I seen righteous before me in this generation. The word is singular — thee, not you. God could have said, for you I have seen righteous — Noah, Shem, Ham, Japheth, and your wives. He did not. The text says nothing against the sons or their wives, but it says nothing specifically about them. The basis of God's action is Noah's righteousness, not theirs. He is the new head, and just as the fall of the creation came through the fall of the head (Adam), so the preservation of this new beginning is grounded in the righteousness of its head. This is not to say the others were excluded or condemned; they were carried through in blessing. But the ground of it is stated as the righteousness of the head, not the collective merit of all eight.

Clean and Unclean: By Sevens and by Two

Of every clean beast thou shalt take by sevens, the male and his female; and of beasts that are not clean by two, the male and his female (7:2). This implies that Noah knew the distinction between clean and unclean animals — long before the Mosaic code of Leviticus was written. The Mosaic distinctions between clean and unclean did not originate with Moses; they gave formal expression to principles already operative. The clean animals are those that both chew the cud and have a divided hoof. These two marks together speak of something: chewing the cud is a picture of meditating on the word of God, returning to it, ruminating on it. The divided hoof speaks of a walk in separation. The clean animal is one that both meditates on divine things and walks in separation from defilement. The two characteristics together define cleanness. The unclean animal may have one mark without the other — the pig parts the hoof but does not chew the cud; the camel chews the cud but does not part the hoof. Both marks are needed.

The seven pairs of clean animals provided the stock for sacrifices after the flood — Noah's first act on exiting the ark was to offer burnt offerings of every clean beast and every clean bird. God's care in preserving the sacrificial kinds was not incidental; the entire sacrificial system, pointing forward to Christ, depended on the preservation of the right animals through the flood.

The Preservation of the Messianic Line

God could not allow all men to be destroyed, because the seed of the woman had been promised and the promise is as good as its utterer. If God had said the seed of the woman would crush the serpent's head, it will happen — which means the messianic line must be preserved through every crisis that seems to threaten it. The flood was such a crisis. God preserved Noah. Through Shem, not through Ham or Japheth, the line runs — and the Lord is a Shemite. This is the recurring pattern in Genesis: the line of blessing does not pass through the firstborn but

through the one God chooses. Japheth was the eldest; Shem was second; Ham was the youngest. Yet it is through Shem that the line proceeds. This pattern — the younger or middle son carrying the blessing rather than the eldest — will appear again with Isaac and Ishmael, Jacob and Esau, and Ephraim and Manasseh. The eldest has rights that are recognized and accounted for; but the line of blessing is not determined by natural birth order but by divine election.

And Noah did according unto all that the LORD commanded him, so did he.