

Noahic Covenant

The Major Covenants · Biblical Covenants

Following the catastrophic Flood that destroyed all air-breathing life outside the ark, God established a universal, unconditional covenant with Noah, his descendants, and every living creature, promising never again to destroy the earth by water. This covenant represents God's commitment to preserve creation's basic order despite human sin, establishing the framework within which all subsequent redemptive history unfolds. After Noah's burnt offering—the first recorded post-Flood worship—the LORD declared in His heart, 'I will not again curse the ground any more for man's sake; for the imagination of man's heart is evil from his youth; neither will I again smite any more every thing living, as I have done. While the earth remaineth, seedtime and harvest, and cold and heat, and summer and winter, and day and night shall not cease' (Genesis 8:21-22).

God formalized this covenant with Noah and his sons: 'And I will establish my covenant with you; neither shall all flesh be cut off any more by the waters of a flood; neither shall there any more be a flood to destroy the earth' (Genesis 9:11). The covenant's scope is breathtakingly comprehensive—not limited to Noah's family but extending to 'every living creature that is with you, of the fowl, of the cattle, and of every beast of the earth... from all that go out of the ark, to every beast of the earth' (Genesis 9:10). This universal compact affects all creation, animal and human, demonstrating God's common grace and providential care over the entire created order.

Note: The Hebrew word for covenant (ברית, berit) appears seven times in Genesis 9:9-17, emphasizing the covenant's solemnity and certainty. Unlike later conditional covenants (like the Mosaic), the Noahic covenant is unilateral and unconditional—God binds Himself regardless of human behavior. The phrase 'everlasting covenant' (Genesis 9:16) indicates perpetual validity. This covenant explains why, despite continued human wickedness, God preserves earth's basic orders: seasonal cycles, agricultural

productivity, cosmic stability. Without this covenant promise, every generation's sin would merit renewed judgment.

God established the rainbow as the covenant sign: 'I do set my bow in the cloud, and it shall be for a token of a covenant between me and the earth... and I will look upon it, that I may remember the everlasting covenant' (Genesis 9:13, 16). The bow appears as a visual reminder—not primarily for humanity but for God Himself, who promises to 'remember' the covenant when He sees it. This anthropomorphic language emphasizes the covenant's absolute reliability: God will not forget His promise. The rainbow, formed by sunlight refracting through water droplets, appears precisely when conditions might trigger fear of another flood—after heavy rains. Its appearance declares that the very elements that destroyed the old world now demonstrate God's covenant faithfulness to preserve the new.

The covenant includes divine authorization for human government and capital punishment: 'Whoso sheddeth man's blood, by man shall his blood be shed: for in the image of God made he man' (Genesis 9:6). This establishes the sanctity of human life rooted in the *imago Dei* and authorizes human authorities to execute justice—foundational to civil government. The covenant also reaffirms humanity's dominion mandate (Genesis 9:2-3) while permitting consumption of animal flesh (previously prohibited), provided blood is not eaten (Genesis 9:4)—prefiguring Levitical blood prohibitions and ultimately pointing to Christ's blood shed for atonement.

This covenant's perpetual nature guarantees that redemptive history will continue until its consummation. Peter references it when assuring that despite scoffers' claims, God's promises remain certain: the same God who destroyed the world by water has reserved it for final judgment by fire (2

Peter 3:5-7). The Noahic covenant thus provides the stable platform upon which God builds His progressive revelation, culminating in Christ and the New Covenant. Every rainbow testifies to divine faithfulness, assuring that though 'the earth also and the works that are therein shall be burned up' (2 Peter 3:10), God's covenant word endures forever.

Key Verses

Genesis 8:21-22

And the LORD smelled a sweet savour; and the LORD said in his heart, I will not again curse the ground any more for man's sake; for the imagination of man's heart is evil from his youth; neither will I again smite any more every thing living, as I have done. While the earth remaineth, seedtime and harvest, and cold and heat, and summer and winter, and day and night shall not cease.

Genesis 9:9-11

And I, behold, I establish my covenant with you, and with your seed after you; and with every living creature that is with you, of the fowl, of the cattle, and of every beast of the earth with you; from all that go out of the ark, to every beast of the earth. And I will establish my covenant with you; neither shall all flesh be cut off any more by the waters of a flood; neither shall there any more be a flood to destroy the earth.

Genesis 9:12-13

And God said, This is the token of the covenant which I make between me and you and every living creature that is with you, for perpetual generations: I do set my bow in the cloud, and it shall be for a token of a covenant between me and the earth.

Genesis 9:15-16

And I will remember my covenant, which is between me and you and every living creature of all flesh; and the waters shall no more become a flood to destroy all flesh. 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.

Isaiah 54:9

For this is as the waters of Noah unto me: for as I have sworn that the waters of Noah should no more go over the earth; so have I sworn that I would not be wroth with thee, nor rebuke thee.

2 Peter 3:5-7

For this they willingly are ignorant of, that by the word of God the heavens were of old, and the earth standing out of the water and in the water: whereby the world that then was, being overflowed with water, perished: but the heavens and the earth, which are now, by the same word are kept in store, reserved unto fire against the day of judgment and perdition of ungodly men.

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