



## Genesis - Chapter Nine

### I. Genesis 1:1-11:26 - Primeval History (continues)

#### I.d Genesis 6:9-9:29 - Noah's Descendants and the Flood (continues/concludes)

##### Summary of Chapter Nine

God blessed Noah and his sons and, through them, all of humankind that would descend from them. He also reaffirmed his covenant with them and pledged that never again would the world be devastated by a great flood. However, the world was still tainted by sin and creation was forever changed. Humans were now permitted to eat the flesh of all other animals, who would come to fear them because of this. God also indicated that, because humans were created in his own image, he required retribution from people and animals for any human blood that would be shed.

Yet peace did not last long on this recovering earth. Noah grew grapes, made some wine and got drunk. He slept naked in his tent and his son Ham saw him and reported this to his two brothers. For this some of his descendants were destined to become subservient to the descendants of the other two brothers.

Noah lived for a further three hundred and fifty years after the flood and died at the age of nine hundred and fifty years old.

#### I.d.v Genesis 9:1-17 - The Covenant with Noah

God reaffirms his commitment to allow humankind to become the dominant species on the planet earth and to have dominion over every other living creature, allowing people to kill and eat the animals for the first time. He made a covenant with Noah that he would never again devastate the human race with a global flood and set the rainbow in the sky as a reminder of this covenant promise. He also established that the shedding of human blood required blood to be shed in

response, whether the perpetrator is an animal or a human, although it is not always the human owner that will be held as the responsible person in the case of domestic animals.

<sup>1</sup> God blessed Noah and his sons, and said to them, ‘Be fruitful and multiply, and fill the earth. <sup>2</sup> The fear and dread of you shall rest on every animal of the earth, and on every bird of the air, on everything that creeps on the ground, and on all the fish of the sea; into your hand they are delivered. <sup>3</sup> Every moving thing that lives shall be food for you; and just as I gave you the green plants, I give you everything. <sup>4</sup> Only, you shall not eat flesh with its life, that is, its blood.

#### Genesis 9:1-4

Be fruitful and multiply, and fill the earth. While God’s speech here closely parallels 1:28-30, two important changes are introduced. First, the positive instruction to exercise dominion over the living creatures is replaced by the negative comment that they will fear and dread human beings. Second, whereas the emphasis was previously on people’s eating from plants, humans are now given permission to be carnivorous. While God now permits the taking of animal life for food, the animal’s blood remains sacred and is not to be consumed, as an acknowledgment that all life is from God: <<*Therefore I have said to the people of Israel: No person among you shall eat blood, nor shall any alien who resides among you eat blood. And anyone of the people of Israel, or of the aliens who reside among them, who hunts down an animal or bird that may be eaten shall pour out its blood and cover it with earth. For the life of every creature – its blood is its life; therefore I have said to the people of Israel: You shall not eat the blood of any creature, for the life of every creature is its blood; whoever eats it shall be cut off*>> (Leviticus 17:12-14).

<sup>5</sup> For your own lifeblood I will surely require a reckoning: from every animal I will require it and from human beings, each one for the blood of another, I will require a reckoning for human life.

<sup>6</sup> Whoever sheds the blood of a human,  
by a human shall that person’s blood be shed;  
for in his own image  
God made humankind.

## Genesis 9:5-6

Following his comments about the killing of animals, God addresses the issue of homicide. Violence by ‘all flesh’ (v.11), i.e. by man and animals, prompted God to send the flood (6:11-13). If human nature has not improved after the flood (6:5 and 8:21), how is violence to be prevented in the future? This legal enactment is the answer: **From human beings I will require a reckoning for human life**. This means that any animal or person that takes a human life will be held accountable by God, working through human representatives, e.g. <<*You shall not murder*>> (Exodus 20:13), and: <<*When an ox gores a man or a woman to death, the ox shall be stoned, and its flesh shall not be eaten; but the owner of the ox shall not be liable*>> (Exodus 21:28).

**Whoever sheds the blood of human, by a human shall that person’s blood be shed**. Here the principle of talion or *lex talionis*, a life for a life, is applied: <<*If any harm follows, then you shall give life for life*>> (Exodus 21:23). This measured response is preferable to Lamech’s seventy-sevenfold vengeance (4:24). It is a principle frequently acknowledged in Scripture, including: <<*Then Reuben answered them, ‘Did I not tell you not to wrong the boy? But you would not listen. So now there comes a reckoning for his blood’*>> (Genesis 42:22), <<*This happened so that the violence done to the seventy sons of Jerubbaal might be avenged and their blood be laid on their brother Abimelech, who killed them, and on the lords of Shechem, who strengthened his hands to kill his brothers*>> (Judges 9:24), <<*The LORD will bring back his bloody deeds on his own head, because, without the knowledge of my father David, he attacked and killed with the sword two men more righteous and better than himself*>> (1 Kings 2:32a), <<*King Joash did not remember the kindness that Jehoiada, Zechariah’s father, had shown him, but killed his son. As he was dying, he said, ‘May the LORD see and avenge!’*>> (2 Chronicles 24:22), <<*For he who avenges blood is mindful of them; he does not forget the cry of the afflicted*>> (Psalm 9:12), and: <<*Then Jesus said to him, ‘Put your sword back into its place; for all who take the sword will perish by the sword’*>> (Matthew 26:52).

Human life is to be valued so highly that it is protected by this system of punishment **for in his own image God made humankind**, and so to murder another human being is to murder what is most like God, and is thus implicitly an attack on God himself. Many would see this statement as establishing the moral principle permitting the death penalty in cases of murder – with the understanding that the person charged would have been justly tried and his guilt established beyond any reasonable doubt. This is confirmed in the OT requirement of two or three witnesses: <<*A single witness shall not suffice to convict a person of any crime or wrongdoing in connection with any offence that may be committed. Only on the evidence of two or three witnesses shall a charge be sustained*>> (Deuteronomy 19:15), and repeated in the NT, e.g. <<*But if you are not listened*

*to, take one or two others along with you, so that every word may be confirmed by the evidence of two or three witnesses*>> (Matthew 18:16), and: <<*Anyone who has violated the law of Moses dies without mercy ‘on the testimony of two or three witnesses’*>> (Hebrews 10:28). A further requirement is that such a death-penalty verdict must always be carried out under the jurisdiction of the established authorities, as confirmed in Deuteronomy 19:15-21 and Romans 13:1-5. The difficulty of establishing guilt beyond any reasonable doubt and the difficulty of ensuring justice in a modern, complex urban society, as compared to an ancient village-based society, underscore the great care and caution that must be taken in applying this principle today.

<sup>7</sup> And you, be fruitful and multiply, abound on the earth and multiply in it.’

### Genesis 9:7

**Be fruitful and multiply.** God’s speech ends as it began in v.1, repeating what was said in 8:17 and echoing 1:28. God wants humanity to flourish and not to be destroyed by violence or another flood. This positive view of population growth stands in sharp contrast to the Babylonian flood story, which ends with the gods taking measures to inhibit mankind from filling the earth.

<sup>8</sup> Then God said to Noah and to his sons with him, <sup>9</sup> ‘As for me, I am establishing my covenant with you and your descendants after you, <sup>10</sup> and with every living creature that is with you, the birds, the domestic animals, and every animal of the earth with you, as many as came out of the ark. <sup>11</sup> I establish my covenant with you, that never again shall all flesh be cut off by the waters of a flood, and never again shall there be a flood to destroy the earth.’

### Genesis 9:8-11

God outlines the **covenant** he is now establishing with all living creatures, having mentioned it briefly before the flood in 6:18. This is the first covenant explicitly named in Genesis, refer to the comment made on 2:17; a similar covenant is later established with Abraham and his descendants in Chapter Seventeen. A covenant formally binds two parties together in a relationship, on the basis of mutual personal commitment, with consequences for keeping or breaking the commitment. God makes this kind of covenant with a group of people by covenanting with one who represents them: everyone else then experiences the covenant by virtue of being included ‘in’ the representative, refer to the comment made on 12:3; here, the animals are included as well as Noah’s descendants, showing Noah to be a kind of new Adam. Emphasising that the covenant is for all living creatures, God states that there will never again be **a flood to destroy the**

earth, even though his people continually break their part of the agreement: <<*The earth lies polluted under its inhabitants; for they have transgressed laws, violated the statutes, broken the everlasting covenant*>> (Isaiah 24:5), <<*The highways are deserted, travellers have left the road. The treaty is broken, its oaths are despised, its obligation is disregarded*>> (Isaiah 33:8), and: <<*But like Adam they transgressed the covenant; there they dealt faithlessly with me*>> (Hosea 6:7).

<sup>12</sup> God said, ‘This is the sign of the covenant that I make between me and you and every living creature that is with you, for all future generations: <sup>13</sup> I have set my bow in the clouds, and it shall be a sign of the covenant between me and the earth. <sup>14</sup> When I bring clouds over the earth and the bow is seen in the clouds, <sup>15</sup> I will remember my covenant that is between me and you and every living creature of all flesh; and the waters shall never again become a flood to destroy all flesh. <sup>16</sup> When the bow is in the clouds, I will see it and remember the everlasting covenant between God and every living creature of all flesh that is on the earth.’ <sup>17</sup> God said to Noah, ‘This is the sign of the covenant that I have established between me and all flesh that is on the earth.’

### Genesis 9:12-17

This is the sign of the covenant that I make between me and you and every living creature that is with you, for all future generations. It is not just the righteous Noah and his family that receive the blessing but all of their descendants and the creatures over whom they have dominion. And Scripture reveals that God keeps his promises: <<*This is like the days of Noah to me: Just as I swore that the waters of Noah would never again go over the earth, so I have sworn that I will not be angry with you and will not rebuke you. For the mountains may depart and the hills be removed, but my steadfast love shall not depart from you, and my covenant of peace shall not be removed, says the LORD, who has compassion on you*>> (Isaiah 54:9-10).

Different covenants have appropriate signs or symbols linked to them. Circumcision is the sign of the covenant with Abraham in Chapter Seventeen, and the Sabbath is the sign of the covenant with Israel at Mount Sinai (Exodus 31:12-17). On this occasion God’s designated sign is the rainbow. Its presence, when rain clouds are in the sky, will be a visible reminder of God’s everlasting covenant. It is not necessary to think that rainbows first began to exist at this time; in any case, God says that he will now use rainbows as a sign of this covenant. The other mentions of a rainbow in the Bible are set in the context of God’s enthroned glory (Ezekiel 1:28, Revelation 4:3 and 10:1). It is staggering to see God, in his glory, setting so

close to himself a reminder of his promise to man. This sign should not be interpreted as symbolising that God has hung up his warrior's bow, since there is no hint of that meaning in the text.

#### I.d.vi Genesis 9:18-29 - Noah and His Sons

This unusual episode provides an unexpected sequel to the flood story. After the flood and the 'new creation' comes another fall, by Noah – a sort of second Adam, in that he, like Adam, is father of the whole human race. It also anticipates similar activity by Lot's daughters after the destruction of Sodom (19:30-38). Noah's drunkenness and Ham's indiscretion result in contrasting announcements regarding the futures of Shem, Japheth, and Ham's son Canaan.

<sup>18</sup> The sons of Noah who went out of the ark were Shem, Ham, and Japheth. Ham was the father of Canaan. <sup>19</sup> These three were the sons of Noah; and from these the whole earth was peopled.

#### Genesis 9:18-19

These verses, which bring the flood story to an end, anticipate the next two episodes. The reference to Ham's son Canaan prepares for the events of vv.20-29. The mention of people's dispersal over the whole earth is developed in the Table of Nations in Chapter Ten.

<sup>20</sup> Noah, a man of the soil, was the first to plant a vineyard.

#### Genesis 9:20

The reference to Noah as a man of the soil and his success in growing vines points to a fresh start after the flood; refer to the comment made on 5:28-31.

<sup>21</sup> He drank some of the wine and became drunk, and he lay uncovered in his tent. <sup>22</sup> And Ham, the father of Canaan, saw the nakedness of his father, and told his two brothers outside. <sup>23</sup> Then Shem and Japheth took a garment, laid it on both their shoulders, and walked backwards and covered the nakedness of their father; their faces were turned away, and they did not see their father's nakedness.

#### Genesis 9:21-23

Became drunk. This is the first mention of intoxicating drink in the Bible, leading some to speculate that its production was not possible before the flood. However, the words of Jesus seem to refute this: <<*They were eating and drinking, and marrying and being given in marriage, until the day Noah entered the ark, and the flood came and destroyed all of them*>> (Luke 17:27). The brevity of the description of Noah's drunkenness is an indication of disapproval. Ham's actions,

however, are the object of serious criticism because Ham unashamedly looks on the nakedness of his father in the tent and then reports this to his brothers. There is no indication, however, that perverse sexual behaviour was involved in addition to Ham seeing his father drunk and naked.

**The prophet may have had this incident in mind when he gave this warning: <<Alas for you who make your neighbours drink, pouring out your wrath until they are drunk, in order to gaze on their nakedness!>> (Habakkuk 2:15).**

Although the text does not explicitly state what happened, it is clear that Ham humiliated and dishonoured his father and that he apparently sought to make his brothers a party to that humiliation. Instead, Ham's brothers make every effort to avoid seeing Noah's naked body, as readers are told twice that they approached him backward. The response of Shem and Japheth is in sharp contrast to Ham's actions, as the brothers honour their father despite his foolish behaviour. This would later become enshrined in God's law: <<*Honour your father and your mother, so that your days may be long in the land that the LORD your God is giving you*>> (Exodus 20:12).

<sup>24</sup> When Noah awoke from his wine and knew what his youngest son had done to him, <sup>25</sup> he said,

‘Cursed be Canaan;  
lowest of slaves shall he be to his brothers.’

<sup>26</sup> He also said,

‘Blessed by the LORD my God be Shem;  
and let Canaan be his slave.

<sup>27</sup> May God make space for Japheth,  
and let him live in the tents of Shem;  
and let Canaan be his slave.’

### Genesis 9:24-27

The designation of Ham as the youngest son is peculiar, given that he is always listed after Shem and before Japheth. Possibly, for some unexplained reason, the traditional order of names does not reflect the birth sequence of the boys.

Cursed be Canaan. Noah's reaction to Ham's action is to curse Canaan, Ham's son. This outcome has clearly been anticipated in the narration, for twice previously it has been mentioned, in each context unnecessarily, that Ham is the father of Canaan. A similar curse was given against the Gibeonites, residents in the land of Canaan, where they tricked the Israelites into a covenant agreement against the

will of God: <<*Now therefore you are cursed, and some of you shall always be slaves, hewers of wood and drawers of water for the house of my God*'>> (Joshua 9:23).

A servant of servants shall he be. This passage was wrongly appealed to in past centuries to justify the enslavement of African people, resulting in grievous abuse, injustice, and inhumanity to people created in the image of God. Noah's curse of Canaan, which focuses on his being a servant, anticipates the judgment that will later befall the Canaanites, as confirmed in Deuteronomy 7:1-3 taken with Genesis 10:15-19. This, coupled with the fact that the curse falls on Canaan alone and not on Ham's other children, who settled in northern Africa, shows how illegitimate it was to use this text to justify enslaving African people. For more on the overall biblical position on slavery, refer to the comments made on 1 Corinthians 7:21, Ephesians 6:5, Colossians 3:22-25 and 1 Timothy 1:10.

Shem, however, is given pride of place, as is implied by Noah's remark that Japheth will live in the tents of Shem.

<sup>28</sup> After the flood Noah lived for three hundred and fifty years. <sup>29</sup> All the days of Noah were nine hundred and fifty years; and he died.

#### Genesis 9:28-29

All the days of Noah were nine hundred and fifty years; and he died. The report of Noah's death continues the pattern used throughout Genesis Chapter Five to describe the total age and death of Adam and his descendants. Noah is the second longest lived person recorded in the bible.