

Introduction

This morning we are going to look at Part I of God's Covenant with Noah. This morning I am going to lay a foundation of what a covenant is, and tie it in to the New Covenant that we have in Christ. Next week, we will look at Genesis 8 and 9 at the specific parts of God's Covenant with Noah. But this morning, I want to introduce that covenant and lay a foundation.

In Genesis 6:17-18, God told Noah that He was bringing a flood of water upon the earth to destroy all flesh in which is the breath of life. He said that everything that is on the earth would perish. Then, He told Noah, "But I will establish My covenant with you; and you shall enter the ark – you and your sons and your wife, and your sons' wives with you."

(Gen 6:17-18) "Behold, I, even I am bringing the flood of water upon the earth, to destroy all flesh in which is the breath of life, from under heaven; everything that is on the earth shall perish. {18} But I will establish My covenant with you; and you shall enter the ark—you and your sons and your wife, and your sons' wives with you."

Now that God has brought the flood of water upon the earth and destroyed all flesh, He establishes His covenant with Noah. But, before we get into God's covenant with Noah, I want to take time to give a proper understanding of covenants. This is actually the third covenant that we find in the Bible. First, we had God's covenant with Adam. Scholars divide the first covenant into two parts, the Edenic Covenant and the Adamic Covenant. The Edenic Covenant was established prior to the fall, and is known as the covenant of innocence. The Adamic Covenant was established after Adam and Eve had sinned, and is known as the covenant of grace. The second covenant is found in Genesis 2, and it is a marriage covenant between Adam and Eve. God's covenant with Noah is the third covenant. The word covenant is not used in the covenant with Adam or in the covenant between Adam and Eve. Genesis 6:18 is the first mention of covenant, so it would be easy to miss the fact that this is actually the third covenant that was established.

This morning, I am going to give an overview of covenant. I will give the definition of covenant and the types of covenants. Second, I will talk about the key parts of a covenant. This would include the exchanges, the blood sacrifice, the vows and oaths, the blessings and curses, the witnesses, the name change, the covenant meal, and the signs of a covenant. Third, I will talk about our covenant with Christ. But, before we get into the meat of the message today, I want to pray. I want to pray out of Psalm 25:14. It reads, "The secret of the LORD is for those who fear Him, And He will make them know His covenant." Lord, You tell us that for those that fear You, You will give understanding and help them know Your covenant. Lord, as a pastor and as a congregation, we want to be those who fear and reverence You. I ask You this morning to make known Your covenant. Give us understanding. Open the eyes of our hearts to behold wonderful things from Your law. As we learn about Your covenants, may we be those who faithfully adhere to the conditions of the covenant. I ask this in Jesus' name. Amen.

God's Covenant With Noah – Part I

1. Introduction To Covenants
2. Key Parts Of A Covenant
3. Our Covenant With Christ

1. Introduction To Covenants

a. Definition of covenant

First, let's look at the definition of a covenant. The Hebrew word is berith (Strong's H1285). It comes from bara, which means cutting. Strong's says cutting, in the sense of cutting a compact, made by passing between two pieces of flesh. In a covenant, two or more parties are bound together. In a covenant, both parties agree to hold up their ends regardless of whether the other party keeps their part of the agreement. A violation of a covenant by one party doesn't matter as far as the other party's responsibility to continue to do what they agreed to do. I was giving counsel to a woman who was very bitter, unforgiving, and did not honor her husband. I told her that she must forgive her husband and treat him with respect. She told me that she would not forgive him, and that she would begin to respect him when his actions deserved respect. I mentioned to her 1 Peter 3:1-2, which says that women should "*be submissive to your own husbands so that if any of them are disobedient to the word, they may be won without a word by the behavior of their wives, as they observe your chaste and respectful behavior.*" If this woman understood covenant, she would have known that she was responsible to keep her part of the covenant, even if her husband was disobedient. She was still to be submissive and respectful.

A covenant is far different than a contract. In a contract, if one person does something in violation of the contract then it is considered broken. The whole contract becomes null and void. Basically the signers of a contract agree to hold up their ends as long as the other signatories hold up theirs too. This is one of the reasons for so many divorces today. In our culture today, we think in terms of contracts, not covenants.

A few years ago Karen and I were counseling a couple. It was the man's fifth wife. One of the key issues with him was the pre-nuptial agreement. In his pre-nuptial agreement, if they got divorced, his business would remain his. His wife would not get any part of his business. A pre-nuptial agreement is a contract, not a covenant. In a covenant, there is no divorce. In a covenant, both parties are bound together for life, whether one is faithful or not. Today, if someone is not happy with their partner, they get a divorce. In a covenant, there is no his or her property. The couple is joined together and everything belongs to them. In a pre-nuptial agreement, each partner has assets that are outside the agreement and stay in that person's possession. Once marriage is moved from a covenant to a contract and it becomes "just a legal thing" then marriage is no longer seen as a lifetime commitment before God.

God is a covenant keeping God. Even if we do not hold up our side of the covenant, God upholds His promises. In 2 Timothy 2:13 Paul writes, "*If we are faithless, He remains faithful, for He cannot deny Himself.*" Paul understood that God was a covenant-keeping God. He would remain faithful, even if we are faithless.

b. Types of covenants

I mentioned that God's covenant with Noah was the third covenant. God's first covenant was with Adam. Both of these covenants are between God and a man. The second covenant was between Adam and Eve. It appears that this is between two people until we take a look at Malachi 2:14. "*Yet you say, 'For what reason?' Because the LORD has been a witness between you and the wife of your youth, against whom you have dealt treacherously, though she is your*

companion and your wife by covenant.” God was a witness in all their covenant marriages, and He is confronting them about how they have dealt treacherously with their wives. In a marriage, both parties are making their vows to one another in the presence of God and other witnesses. The covenant is between a man and a woman, but there are other parties involved. God made a covenant with Israel, which was a nation. It was not just between God and one person, but it was between God and millions of people.

c. Length of covenant

Some covenants are in place until the death of one of the parties. When a man and woman take their vows, it is until death do us part. When Paul discusses this in 1 Corinthians 7:39, he says, *“A wife is bound as long as her husband lives; but if her husband is dead, she is free to be married to whom she wishes, only in the Lord.”* Paul understood that men and women were bound together in marriage until death.

We know that there are no marriages in heaven. In Matthew 22, the Sadducees were trying to trick Jesus. They told Him about a woman whose husband had died. Her brother married her, and then he died. There were seven brothers and they all married her and died. The Sadducees, who do not believe in the resurrection of the dead, asked Jesus whose wife she would be in the resurrection. Jesus answered in Matthew 22:30, *“for in the resurrection they neither marry nor are given in marriage, but are like angels in heaven.”* We will be like angels. The marriage in heaven is between the bridegroom, Jesus, and bride, which is the church.

In other covenants, the length is until a new and better covenant is established. The old covenant was in place until Christ established a new and better covenant. In Hebrews 8:13, we read, *“When He said, ‘A new covenant,’ He has made the first obsolete. But whatever is becoming obsolete and growing old is ready to disappear.”* The old covenant was in place until God replaced it with a better covenant, the new covenant.

Some covenants are established with a specific time period. Last week, In Genesis 9:11, God elaborates on this and clearly vows to never again to use a flood to destroy the earth and all flesh. This was a promise to all generations, and it still applies to us today.

(Gen 9:11) *“I establish My covenant with you; and all flesh shall never again be cut off by the water of the flood, neither shall there again be a flood to destroy the earth.”*

2. Key Parts of a covenant:

a. Blood Sacrifice

Now, let's take a look at some of the key parts of a covenant. We will start with the various exchanges that take place in a covenant. The first element in a covenant that we will look at is the blood sacrifice. In Hebrews 9:18-20, we find that for a covenant to be valid, there must be shedding of blood. The first covenant in this passage is the Old Covenant, which God made with Moses and Israel. It was inaugurated with blood. Moses took the blood of the calves and the goats and sprinkled it on the book and the people, saying, *“This is the blood of the covenant which God commanded you.”*

(Heb 9:18-20) “Therefore even the first covenant was not inaugurated without blood. {19} For when every commandment had been spoken by Moses to all the people according to the Law, he took the blood of the calves and the goats, with water and scarlet wool and hyssop, and sprinkled both the book itself and all the people, {20} saying, "THIS IS THE BLOOD OF THE COVENANT WHICH GOD COMMANDED YOU.”

In Genesis 3, God sacrificed an animal and took the skins and clothed Adam and Eve. There was a sacrifice of blood. In God's covenant with Noah, Noah took some of every clean animal and offered a burnt offering to the Lord on the altar that he had made. There was a blood sacrifice.

In Genesis 15, God made a covenant with Abraham. God had Abraham bring him a three-year old heifer, a three-year old female goat, a three-year old ram, a turtle dove, and a pigeon. Then, he cut the animals in half and laid each half opposite of the other. This was the blood sacrifice in that covenant.

b. Exchanges

There are a number of exchanges that take place. There was an exchange of garments, belts, swords, and vows. There are also signs given that signify that a covenant has taken place. Let's take a few minutes to look at these various exchanges that take place in a covenant.

Exchange of Vows and Oaths: In a covenant, each person makes a vow before the other person, that is being witnessed by you and by God. When we make a vow, God expects us to keep and honor our vows. In a marriage ceremony, the bridegroom and bride exchange their vows. Some couples write their own vows, and others use generic vows from wedding books. When Karen and I were married, we were married in an Episcopal Church. We used the vows from the Episcopal Liturgy. If I was to do it over, I would write my own vows.

When I was a golf professional managing a golf resort in Florida, I used to give Walt Zembriski golf lessons. Walt was on the Senior PGA Tour and after I began working with him, he won four tournaments. At that time Walt had been dating a lady by the name of Cheryl Wray Hudson. She owned a magazine called the Tee Times. I wrote a lot of teaching articles for her magazine. Walt decided it was time for them to tie the knot, and so he asked Cheryl to marry him. As they discussed the wedding vows, Walt told her what vows he expected her to make. He told her that he wanted her to love, honor, and obey him. Everything was going okay until he said that. She looked him straight in the face and told him to go get himself a dog. She was not going to vow to obey Walt. She was pretty independent and the love, honor, and OBEY him was too much for her. They broke up that day over marriage vows.

In Malachi, God was reminding them that the nation of Israel was not living up to the marriage vows that they had made with each other. Witnesses encourage and help people fulfill the vows that they have made. The vows are valid as long as the person is alive. That is the reason that you have all heard wedding vows made that state that the bride or groom will love each other in sickness and in health, until death do us part. Paul addresses this in 1 Corinthians when he said that a woman is bound to her husband as long as he is alive.

God's covenant with Noah actually begins in Genesis 8, which we covered last week. After Noah offered a sacrifice from all the clean animals, God begins to make His vows of the

covenant. He said He would not curse the ground again because of men. He said that the intent of man's heart is evil from his youth on. The second vow that God made was that He would not destroy the earth. We will get into these vows more next week.

Exchange of Garments: There was also an exchange of garments. Garments are a covering, and more specifically, a covering for sin. In Genesis 3:21, God made garments of skin and clothed them. In the exchange of garments, our strengths become our partners strengths and our weaknesses become our partner's weaknesses. In Philippians 4:13 Paul wrote, "*I can do all things through Him (Christ) who strengthens me.*" Paul understood the exchange of strengths. He was strong in Christ's strength. We bear one another's burdens.

Exchange of Weapons: There was also an exchange of weapons. This exchange represented their friends and enemies. Our friends become their friends and our enemies become their enemies. In a practical sense, we are to defend those we are in covenant with. We are to defend their honor, their reputation, and their lives. There was a defending of one another unto death. When a king formed a covenant with another king, they would go out to battle together to fight their enemies.

In 1 Samuel 18:3-4, "*Jonathan made a covenant with David because he loved him as himself. Jonathan stripped himself of the robe that was on him and gave it to David, with his armor, including his sword and his bow and his belt.*" Their hearts were knit together in that covenant. There was an exchange of both garments and weapons. When Saul tried to kill David, it was Jonathan who helped him escape. Jonathan was looking out for the welfare of David, even at the risk of his own life.

In a marriage covenant, we defend our partner at all times. We do not allow others to speak ill of our partner, and we do not ever speak ill of our partner. We defend their honor, reputation, and life. In 1 Peter 3, men are called to grant their wives honor, and women are called to respect and honor their husbands. We defend one another and protect one another in a covenant relationship.

c. Blessings & Curses

Another element in a covenant was the blessing. It was usually given at the time of the covenant meal. When God made a covenant with Noah, He blessed them and told them to be fruitful and multiply. God blessed every living plant and creature. When God made a covenant with Abram, He blessed him and said that he would be a blessing to the whole earth. (See Genesis 12:3, 18:18, and 22:18.)

In addition to blessings, there were also curses in a covenant. In the covenant that God made with Moses, he was to stand on Mount Gerizim and place blessings on Israel. Then, he was to stand on Mount Ebal and pronounce curses on Mount Ebal for failures to keep the covenant. In Deuteronomy 27-28, we are given the blessings and curses that were part of the Old Covenant.

(Deut 11:29) "It shall come about, when the LORD your God brings you into the land where you are entering to possess it, that you shall place the blessing on Mount Gerizim and the curse on Mount Ebal."

d. Witnesses

There are also witnesses in a covenant. We saw earlier in Malachi 2:14 that God was a witness of our marriage covenants. The people that attend the wedding are also witnesses. The witnesses of a covenant are not just bystanders who see an event. Just like God called Israel to account in Malachi, the witnesses are there to encourage the parties to honor their covenant with one another.

e. Name Change

Another element of the covenant is the name change. We see name changes with a lot of people that God made covenants with. When God entered a covenant with Abram, he was given a new name: Abraham. He also gave Sarai a new name, Sarah. God gave Jacob a new name, Israel.

In a marriage, the bride takes on the name of her husband. The taking on of a name is important, because there is authority in a name. A husband and wife share the same name, and the same bank account. She can take out credit cards with that name.

f. Covenant Meal

Another element of the covenant was the covenant meal. In Genesis 14:18, Melchizedek brought out the wine and bread, and God and Abram shared a covenant meal together. In Genesis 31:46, when Laban and Jacob made a covenant, they exchanged vows and shared a meal together. In many weddings, the bride and groom share a covenant meal by taking the Lord's Supper together. A covenant meal, consisting of wine and bread was a normal part of establishing a covenant.

g. Signs of a Covenant (to Remember)

Another important element of a covenant is the sign or seal of the covenant. When God made the covenant with Noah, He gave the rainbow as a sign that He would never again destroy the whole earth with a flood. Every time we see a rainbow, we are assured by it of His covenantal promise.

When God made a covenant with Abraham, he required every male to be circumcised. The circumcision was the sign to Israel of the covenant. There was blood shed in a circumcision. In Exodus 4:25, Zipporah called Moses a "*bridegroom of blood to me...because of the circumcision.*"

In a marriage covenant, there is an exchange of rings. The rings are a constant reminder or sign of the covenant that the couple has made with one another.

As a summary of the various parts of a covenant, I want us to look at Jacob's covenant with Laban, which is found in Genesis 31:44-52. After Jacob took his wives and livestock and left Laban, Laban pursued him for a week. When Laban finally caught up with Jacob, they entered into a covenant. Let's read it.

(Gen 31:44-54) "So now come, let us make a covenant, you and I, and let it be a witness between you and me." {45} Then Jacob took a stone and set it up as a pillar. {46} Jacob said

to his kinsmen, "Gather stones." So they took stones and made a heap, and they ate there by the heap. {47} Now Laban called it Jegar-sahadutha, but Jacob called it Galeed. {48} Laban said, "This heap is a witness between you and me this day." Therefore it was named Galeed, {49} and Mizpah, for he said, "May the LORD watch between you and me when we are absent one from the other. {50} If you mistreat my daughters, or if you take wives besides my daughters, although no man is with us, see, God is witness between you and me." {51} Laban said to Jacob, "Behold this heap and behold the pillar which I have set between you and me. {52} This heap is a witness, and the pillar is a witness, that I will not pass by this heap to you for harm, and you will not pass by this heap and this pillar to me, for harm. {53} The God of Abraham and the God of Nahor, the God of their father, judge between us." So Jacob swore by the fear of his father Isaac. {54} Then Jacob offered a sacrifice on the mountain, and called his kinsmen to the meal; and they ate the meal and spent the night on the mountain."

They took stones and made a heap of them. That stone served two purposes. It was a witness and reminder of the covenant they made together. After making the heap of stones, at a covenant meal and exchanged oaths or vows. Jacob was not going to mistreat his wives or take other wives. They were not going to cross over that heap of stones and do harm to one another. Their vows were made before God so that He was a witness of their covenant. Then, they offered a blood sacrifice. Finally, they called together their kinsmen and celebrated the covenant that they had made. Their kinsmen were also witnesses of the covenant that had been made.

3. Our Covenant With Christ

In the New Testament or New Covenant, God made a new covenant through Christ. It is available to anyone who believes and is willing to receive Christ into their life. In John 6, Jesus said that He is the Bread of Life and His blood is true drink. Jesus' blood is represented by the wine that we drink, and it represents the new covenant. Jesus was the blood sacrifice that was made to establish a covenant with us. Let's take a look at what Jesus said in John 6.

(John 6:51-56) "I am the living bread that came down out of heaven; if anyone eats of this bread, he will live forever; and the bread also which I will give for the life of the world is My flesh.' {52} Then the Jews began to argue with one another, saying, 'How can this man give us His flesh to eat?' {53} So Jesus said to them, 'Truly, truly, I say to you, unless you eat the flesh of the Son of Man and drink His blood, you have no life in yourselves. {54} He who eats My flesh and drinks My blood has eternal life, and I will raise him up on the last day. {55} For My flesh is true food, and My blood is true drink. {56} He who eats My flesh and drinks My blood abides in Me, and I in him.'"

We enter into a covenant with God through the body and blood of Christ. In 1 Peter 1:18-19, Peter writes that we "*were not redeemed with perishable things like silver or gold from your futile way of life inherited from your forefathers, {19} but with precious blood, as of a lamb unblemished and spotless, the blood of Christ.*" We enter into a covenant with God through the unblemished and spotless blood of Christ.

When we come into a covenant relationship with Christ, we confess Him to be Lord or Master. Be confessing Him as Lord, we are stating that we will follow Him and keep His commandments. At the same time, God receives us into His family. In Ephesians 1-2, we have

every spiritual blessing in the heavenly places. We were enemies and alienated from God and His promises. But, when we receive Christ, we have peace with God. We are no longer enemies, but are reconciled to God and have peace with Him. We are now called friends of God. In John 15:13, Jesus said there is no greater love than to lay your life down for your friends. We were enemies before the new covenant. By coming into a covenant relationship with Christ, we become friends and family. We become sons and daughters of God, and He becomes our Father.

When we come into a covenant relationship with God, there is an exchange of garments. He takes away our garments of sin and clothes us with righteousness. Isaiah prophesied about this in Isaiah 61:10. *“I will rejoice greatly in the LORD, my soul will exult in my God; for He has clothed me with garments of salvation, He has wrapped me with a robe of righteousness, as a bridegroom decks himself with a garland, and as a bride adorns herself with her jewels.”* God clothes us with His righteousness. The Apostle Paul wrote about this in 2 Corinthians 5:21. He said, *“He who knew no sin was made sin on our behalf that we might become the righteousness of God in Him.”*

When we come into a covenant relationship with God, there are blessings. That is very good news for us. In Galatians 3:13 we read that *“Christ redeemed us from the curse of the Law, having become a curse for us, for it is written, ‘Cursed is everyone who hangs on a tree.’”* Jesus took our sins and the curses for our disobedience and took them to the cross. We have even more good news in Ephesians 1:3. Paul writes, *“Blessed be the God and Father of our Lord Jesus Christ, who has blessed us with every spiritual blessing in the heavenly places in Christ.”* Christ took our curses on Himself, and He gave us every spiritual blessing in the heavenly places. We have a very good covenant in Christ.

When we come into a covenant relationship with God, we take on Christ's name, and we are called Christians. We are no longer called sinners, but saints. We have a new name and a new identity. Paul makes this very clear in 2 Corinthians 5:21. *“He who knew no sin was made sin on our behalf that we might be CALLED the righteousness of God in Him.”* In the New Testament or New Covenant, we are called saints, not sinners. As saints, we should live holy and blameless lives. We still sin, but that is not who we are. The Apostle John said that believers should stand out or be obvious. Those that practice righteousness are children of God and those that practice sin are not. Our lives should be characterized by practicing righteousness. We have a new name and a new identity.

There is power and authority in the name of Jesus. We pray in the name of Jesus and we see people healed, delivered, and set free. When we pray in the name of Jesus, our prayers are answered. When we pray in the name of Jesus, we are doing official business on His behalf; we are representing Him. In Acts 19:13-16, some Jewish priests tried to take authority over some evil spirits in the name of Jesus. The evil spirit answered them, saying, *“I recognize Jesus, I know about Paul, but who are you?”* The evil spirit leaped on them, subdued them, and overpowered them, and they fled naked. They were not in a covenant relationship with Christ. They did not have the authority to use the name of Jesus.

In our covenant with God, there are also signs. The sign in the Old Covenant was circumcision. In our New Covenant, God circumcises our hearts; it is an inward circumcision. In Colossians 2:11-12, Paul said, *“in Him you were also circumcised with a circumcision made without hands, in the removal of the body of the flesh by the circumcision of Christ; having been buried with*

Him in baptism, in which you were also raised up with Him through faith in the working of God, who raised Him from the dead." Baptism is an outward sign of what God has done inwardly. We celebrate the resurrection of Christ today. It was His death and His resurrection that is pictured in baptism. Christ died for our sins and took our sins upon Himself. He rose from the dead three days later, and was raised up to new life. In our covenant through Christ, He took our sins and our penalty, and exchanged it for life and freedom.

The Lord's Supper is another sign to help us remember our covenant. In our new covenant with God, Jesus shed His blood for us to make the covenant valid. In Matthew 26:26, when Jesus celebrated the wine and bread with His disciples, *"He took some bread, and after a blessing, He broke it and gave it to the disciples, and said, 'Take, eat; this is My body.'*" Jesus shed His blood to establish a new covenant with us. Jesus laid down His life for our sins. His body was broken and His blood was shed for us. Our new covenant with Christ was made with the blood of Christ. Our covenant with Him was established through what He did and our entering into a relationship with Him. When we take communion, we are remembering what Jesus has done for us. We are remembering the covenant that He has established with us. Therefore, the Lord's Supper is for those who have entered into a covenant relationship with Christ.

Pass out elements

We practice open communion at the Connection Church, which means that you do not have to be a member of this church to participate. But, you should be in a covenant relationship with Christ, i.e. a believer, to partake of the covenant meal.

In 1 Corinthians 11:23-26, Paul writes, *"For I received from the Lord that which I also delivered to you, that the Lord Jesus in the night in which He was betrayed took bread; and when He had given thanks, He broke it and said, 'This is My body, which is for you; do this in remembrance of Me.'* (PAUSE: **Pray and thank Jesus for His body, the Bread of Life.**) *In the same way He took the cup also after supper, saying, 'This cup is the new covenant in My blood; do this, as often as you drink it, in remembrance of Me.'* For as often as you eat this bread and drink the cup, you proclaim the Lord's death until He comes. (PAUSE: **Pray and thank Jesus for the New Covenant that we have in His blood.**)

We will now be celebrating a meal together next door. I invite all of you to stay for the meal. I am going to pray over it and bless it now.