

Week 5: Re-establishing his realm (Genesis 9–10)

God's world was corrupted when the godly descendants lost their values (Genesis 6), so God took responsibility to cleanse the corrupted world (Genesis 7). God saved the world through one person in partnership with him (Genesis 8). After the flood, Noah recognized the LORD's sovereign authority (worship), and the LORD committed to continue the relationship (8:20-22).

Any questions before we look at the world God replanted the world through Noah?

Genesis 9: God remakes the world

Genesis 9 is effectively a new creation. As Noah emerges from his little preservation box after a year, what's the same in this new creation, and what's different? That's what Genesis 9 is all about.

Will God trust the world to human hands again? From the start, humans abused the authority God gave us, grasping God's power for ourselves, killing each other and the animals he entrusted to our care. Don't forget, *The LORD regretted that he had made human beings on the earth, and his heart was deeply troubled (6:6), for the earth was ruined and full of violence (6:11).*



Image: <https://learningfromchrist.com/noahs-flood-debate-history-evidence/>

Surely God could do better than partnering with us? Don't we compromise God's integrity? Those who suffer wars and abuse cry, "How can there be a God?" It's not like God needs us to rule the world. Seriously, what do we contribute that God couldn't do better? Don't we merely misrepresent God's authority?

These big questions are explored again and again in the history of God's people, in the Psalms, in the Prophets, in the Gospels, in the Letters, and in Revelation. Why does God, with all power at his disposal, want to partner with our weakness?

Genesis doesn't explain why God uses his power in a way that seems foolish to us. Only later in the story do we recognize the Father who doesn't force his authority on us because he's **raising a family to maturity through his love**. He calls us to *kneel before the Father from whom every family in heaven and on earth derives its name* (Ephesians 3:14). With his Spirit in our inner being and his Messiah dwelling in our hearts through trust, humanity becomes rooted and grounded in his love, coming to know the love he has given us by raising up his Messiah as the full expression of the width and length and height and depth of his immeasurable love, so we're filled with the full measure of God (Eph. 3:16-19). Does that seem to you like an impossible hope? Seriously, this is what the power of God achieves: *immeasurably more than all we can ask and imagine, through his power that is at work in us* (Eph. 3:20).

That's why God did not give up on humanity, on the original vocation he gave us to image him to creation. Through his partnership with Noah, God restored creation.

Addressing violence (9:1-7)

But not everything is the same after the flood. The problem is the human tendency to violence. People do evil to each other from their youth (8:21).³⁵ So, in replanting the world, God makes changes to address violence:

Genesis 9:1-7 (NIV)

¹ Then God blessed Noah and his sons, saying to them,

“Be fruitful and increase in number and fill the earth. ² The fear and dread of you will fall on all the beasts of the earth, and on all the birds in the sky, on every creature that moves along the ground, and on all the fish in the sea; they are given into your hands.

³ Everything that lives and moves about will be food for you. Just as I gave you the green plants, I now give you everything.

⁴ “But you must not eat meat that has its lifeblood still in it.

⁵ And for your lifeblood I will surely demand an accounting.

I will demand an accounting from every animal.

And from each human being, too, I will demand an accounting for the life of another human being.

⁶ “Whoever sheds human blood, by humans shall their blood be shed; for in the image of God has God made mankind.

⁷ As for you, be fruitful and increase in number; multiply on the earth and increase upon it.”

Humans have been killing each other (4:8, 23), but the violence is broader than that. God had given them green plants for food (1:30), but they'd been killing animals too. The violence corrupted the earth (6:11), leaving the creatures in *fear and dread* of the humans (verse 2).

It's not what God intended, but almost from the start Abel was keeping flocks and offering some as a gift to God (4:4). God accepted Abel's gift, as he did Noah's (8:20), but it seems that offering animals as food to God was what ancient cultures practiced rather than what God wanted (Psalm 50:9-13).

God offers a concession. They can kill and eat animals if they drain the life-blood from the creature, recognizing they've taken its life (compare Leviticus 17:11, 14; Deut, 12:23).

But human blood is another matter. God does not want to see human blood spilled on the soil, as it was when Cain killed Abel (4:10). God cares about every bird that falls to the ground, yet his love for his human family is so much more (Matthew 10:29-31). They must stop killing each other.

Humans bear God's image (9:6), so striking down another human is striking at God. Whatever we do to another human, we're doing to God since God made us in his image.

God now does something counterintuitive. If people abused authority I'd given them, I'd withdraw or diminish their authority. God does the opposite. Humans have

³⁵ The Hebrew word *nēûrîm* refers to youth (e.g. Numbers 30:43; Psalm 25:7; Isaiah 54:6; Malachi 2:15), so this verse is not teaching that infants are born sinful.

overstepped the boundaries God set for us: taking the lives of the animals entrusted to our care, and taking each other's lives in violation of our calling to image God in creation. Yet, instead of reducing the trust God gave us, God gives us more! For the first time, God gives us authority over each other's lives.

Literally translated, this is the decree God issues in Genesis 9:6: *"Whoever sheds blood of the human, by the human shall their blood be shed, because in his image God made the human."*

For the first time, the human community has authority over human life. God authorizes the use of **capital punishment**, a practice that's still lawful in [55 countries](#) today.³⁶

The strange thing is that this is **not what God himself did** when he was managing the world directly. Instead of taking Cain's life as the community expected, God put a mark on Cain to protect him so the community would not kill him (4:15).

So God gives us the power to punish each other, as a deterrent to limit violence. What you do to another may be done to you. Does the threat of punishment inhibit evil-doers? It probably does have some effect.

On the other hand, if God puts the power of life-and-death into human hands, aren't we likely to abuse that power too? Doesn't this open the door to human rulers forming nations and killing (war) to build their kingdoms? That's exactly what happens in Genesis 10. And it isn't just the other nations; God's own people regularly abuse this power too (e.g. Genesis 37:20; 2 Samuel 11:15; 2 Kings 21:16).

"A life for a life" was not God's creational ideal. It's not what God himself practiced before he authorized human government. It's an accommodation to limit violence in the world. Right or wrong, *anyone who is hanged is under God's curse* (Deuteronomy 21:23) because the authority is delegated from God.

God authorized the power of human government because it's better than anarchy. God authorized this power knowing that one day he would face and deal with that evil himself (John 12:47-50; Galatians 3:13). So, until the world is set right in the Messiah, this is the world we live in (Romans 13:1-5).

Thank you, God for not giving up on us, for working with us towards a new creation where heaven's government is restored to earth in Christ, as *we all reach unity in the faith and in the knowledge of the Son of God and become mature, attaining to the whole measure of the fullness of Christ* (Ephesians 4:13).

Your thoughts?

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³⁶ <https://www.bbc.com/news/world-45835584> accessed 2024-02-25.

God's commitment to reign (9:8-17)

If God has given the community authority over human lives, has God stepped away from managing the world? Has God abdicated, leaving governance of the world to us?

God's answer is a resounding, "No!" With a covenant, the heavenly sovereign proclaims he will never give up reigning over us, no matter how difficult we are to manage:

Genesis 9:8-17 (NIV)

⁸ Then God said to Noah and to his sons with him: ⁹ "I now establish my **covenant** with you and with your descendants after you ¹⁰ and with every living creature that was with you—the birds, the livestock and all the wild animals, all those that came out of the ark with you—every living creature on earth. ¹¹ I establish my **covenant** with you: Never again will all life be destroyed by the waters of a flood; never again will there be a flood to destroy the earth."

¹² And God said,

"This is the sign of the **covenant** I am making between me and you and every living creature with you, a **covenant** for all generations to come: ¹³ I have set my rainbow in the clouds, and it will be the sign of the **covenant** between me and the earth. ¹⁴ Whenever I bring clouds over the earth and the rainbow appears in the clouds, ¹⁵ I will remember my **covenant** between me and you and all living creatures of every kind. Never again will the waters become a flood to destroy all life. ¹⁶ Whenever the rainbow appears in the clouds, I will see it and remember the everlasting **covenant** between God and all living creatures of every kind on the earth."

¹⁷ So God said to Noah, "This is the sign of the **covenant** I have established between me and all life on the earth."

Covenant is a keyword in the Bible. God covenanted himself to **Abraham**, promising a nation from his descendants (Genesis 15, 17). God's covenant with **Israel** established them as a nation under God's reign (Exodus 24). God's covenant with **David** promised him the kingship (Psalm 89:3), so when the kingship fell the prophets declared God would make a new covenant in the **Messiah** (Jeremiah 31:31; Mark 14:24).

God's covenant with Noah promises God's on-going governance of all people (verse 9), all creatures (verse 10), the earth itself (verse 11). In the Ancient Near East, almost every nation had a covenant with their ruler setting out the responsibilities of the ruler and the people. But none of the other nations had covenants with their gods.

The point of this covenant is therefore God's **kingship**. Although he has authorized human authorities, God unilaterally commits to never giving up the earth as a kingdom over which he reigns, a kingdom of heaven.

God commits to never wiping out his kingdom, regardless of how difficult we are to manage. If you can imagine how terrified the people may have felt next time the rains set in, the rainbow in the clouds stood as a sign of the light of heaven beyond, God's covenant commitment to care for us forever.

That's the significance of the Noah covenant: God's faithfulness to all people, all creatures, and earth itself.

And ultimately, all God's covenant commitments find fulfilment in Christ:

- The faithfulness of God is revealed in his Anointed as Christ fulfils God's covenant to **David**.
- The faithfulness of God is revealed in the Messiah as he fulfils God's covenant commitments to **Israel** (Romans 3:21) and **Abraham** (Galatians 3:16-22).
- The faithfulness of God is revealed in Christ as he fulfils God's covenant commitment to all people through **Noah**, bringing the nations and Israel together as the kingdom of God in Christ (Matthew 28:18-20).
- The faithfulness of God is revealed for all creation as the one who sits on the throne finally declares, "See: I am making all things new!" (Revelation 21:5)

That's the global significance of the Noah covenant. Your thoughts?

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The drunken leader (9:18-29)

In the world God reconstructed after the flood, Noah is the head of the family, and God has given authority to humans over human lives. **How does Noah use the authority God has given him?** That's what the rest of Chapter 9 is all about.

Genesis 9:18-23 (NIV)

¹⁸ The sons of Noah who came out of the ark were Shem, Ham and Japheth. (Ham was the father of Canaan.) ¹⁹ These were the three sons of Noah, and from them came the people who were scattered over the whole earth.

²⁰ Noah, a man of the soil, proceeded to plant a vineyard. ²¹ When he drank some of its wine, he became drunk and lay uncovered inside his tent. ²² Ham, the father of Canaan, saw his father naked and told his two brothers outside. ²³ But Shem and Japheth took a garment and laid it across their shoulders; then they walked in backward and covered their father's naked body. Their faces were turned the other way so that they would not see their father naked.

This is the first reference to **alcohol** in the Bible. Scripture does not condemn drinking wine (Matthew 9:17; John 2:7-11; 1 Timothy 5:23), but it does warn against drunkenness (Proverbs 23:20; Luke 21:34; Romans 13:13; Galatians 5:21; Ephesians 5:18; 1 Peter 4:3). Specifically, drunkenness impairs the judgement of leaders (Proverbs 20:1-3; 1 Timothy 3:3, 9; Titus 1:7; 2:3).

Perhaps Noah was using wine as an escape. Can you imagine the horrific loss he felt? Outside his nuclear family everyone Noah knew was gone. Lot experienced that kind of loss at Sodom too, and that's the next time we hear about drunkenness (19:32-35). But drunkenness didn't solve Lot's problems. Or Noah's.

Noah's drunkenness only increased his shame. Inebriated, he *lay naked inside his tent* (verse 21). That's not criminal, but it was shameful for a leader to behave this way.

Noah's sons responded to his shame in different ways. One son (Ham) blabbed about it, thereby increasing Noah's shame (verse 22). The other two took steps to cover Noah's indiscretion, limiting his exposure and shame (verse 23). Seriously, that's all that's going on. There is no reason to read homosexual activity into the story as some have tried to do.

What matters is the way Noah responds when he comes to and realizes his shame. The first leader to whom God gave authority over the lives of other people responds in a way that has characterized human leaders throughout history. He demotes the one who blabbed his shame publicly, and elevates the ones who covered his shame:

Genesis 9:24-29 (NIV)

²⁴ When Noah awoke from his wine and found out what his youngest son had done to him, ²⁵ he said,

“Cursed be Canaan! The lowest of **slaves** will he be to his brothers.”

²⁶ He also said,

“Praise be to the LORD, the God of Shem!

May Canaan be the **slave** of Shem.

²⁷ May God extend Japheth's territory;

may Japheth live in the tents of Shem,

and may Canaan be the **slave** of Japheth.”

²⁸ After the flood Noah lived 350 years.

²⁹ Noah lived a total of 950 years, and then he died.

This is the first time we've heard the word *slave*, and it's here three times. God gave Noah authority over human lives, and Noah used his authority to enslave people! Noah used the authority of God's name to elevate those who covered his shame and enslave the descendants of the one who promoted his shame.

Does that sound familiar? Do you ever see leaders acting like that? If Noah was a *righteous man* (6:9; 7:1) who *did all the LORD commanded him* (6:22; 7:5) and yet Noah abused his power, won't other leaders have the same problem?

Think about the kings of Israel. Saul abused the authority God gave him (1 Samuel). So did David when he became king (2 Samuel). Solomon effectively enslaved the people, and it split the kingdom (1 Kings 12). Eventually God sacked the shepherds he'd appointed because they were eating the sheep (Ezekiel 34).

Of course, the rulers of the nations are like this too. Pharaoh enslaved Jacob's family. Assyria and Babylon took for themselves the nation God established. Rome crucified the King of the Jews.

So, what kind of world do we have now that God has given humans authority over each other's lives? Won't people form nations with their own leaders instead of living under God's sovereignty. That's what happens in the next chapter.

But first, your thoughts on Genesis 9?

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Genesis 10: The nations

Chapter 10 is a new section. Previously we were hearing *the account* (tô·lē·dôt) of *Noah* (6:9). Now we're hearing *the account* (tôlēdôt) of *Noah's sons* (verses 1 & 32). It's all about the *nations* that came from each son, structured like this:

Genesis 10 (NIV)

¹ This is the **account** [tôlēdôt] of Shem, Ham and Japheth, Noah's sons, who themselves had sons after the flood.

² The sons of **Japheth**: ... ⁵ by their clans within their **nations**, each with its own language.

⁶ The sons of **Ham**: ... ²⁰ These are the sons of Ham by their clans and languages, in their territories and **nations**.

²¹ Sons were also born to **Shem**, whose older brother was Japheth ... ³¹ These are the sons of Shem by their clans and languages, in their territories and **nations**.

³² These are the clans of Noah's sons, according to their **lines of descent** [tôlēdôt], within their nations. From these the nations spread out over the earth after the flood.

Naturally, the list of nations only covers the nations Israel knew. There's nothing about the cultures of ancient China or south America, nothing on the first nations of Australia.

Nevertheless, God's nation was acknowledging the nations that existed before them:

The Table of Nations is a serious attempt, unprecedented in the Ancient Near East to sketch a panorama of all known human cultures—from Greece and Crete in the west through Asia Minor and Iran down through Mesopotamia and the Arabian peninsula to northwestern Africa.³⁷

Shem is the one we're interested in, because Abraham was his descendant (11:20-26). But before we get to Abraham as grandfather of Israel, Genesis 1–11 asserts **YHWH's authority over all nations**. Remember, God promised to never give up on reigning over all people (9:8-17).

If the nations were doing right, they would acknowledge the LORD as their ruler and live under his authority. But the nations rise with rulers of their own, since God has given humans authority over each other's lives (9:5-6). As we saw with Noah, human leaders twist that power to their own benefit: enslaving people (9:25-27). So it's no surprise that Noah's sons form nations with their own rulers, instead of recognizing God's authority.

God lets the nations go their own way. In time, he will call Abraham and establish a nation through him. The whole point of Israel is so the nations can discover the blessing they're missing by not recognizing the Lord's authority (12:3; 26:4; 35:11).

Does that make sense of this chapter, of why the 70 nations matter?

³⁷ Robert Alter, *Genesis: Translation and Commentary* (W. W. Norton & Company, 1997), 42.



"Table of Nations" in *Zondervan Atlas of the Bible* edited by Carl G. Rasmussen (Zondervan, 2010), 83.

Watch carefully where Noah's sons established their nations:

- Japheth's descendants went northwest, forming nations in **Europe**.
- Ham's descendants went south, forming nations in **Africa**.
- Shem's descendants remained in the **Middle East**. (*Semitic* comes from Shem.)

Watch also the emphasis given to each of Noah's sons in this chapter:

- Shem gets ten verses, since he's the line to Abraham (verses 21-31).
- Japheth is the eldest, but he gets just four verses (verses 2-5).
- The bulk of the chapter is about Ham (verses 6-19). Why?

Ham's descendants don't just build *nations*. They build *kingdoms*. And they don't do that in their own space (Africa). They do that by introducing **war** to the Middle East, invading the lands of their brothers to build kingdoms:

Genesis 10:6-12 (NIV)

⁶ The sons of Ham: Cush, Egypt, Put and Canaan. ...

⁸ Cush was the father of Nimrod, who became a mighty **warrior** on the earth. ⁹ He was a mighty hunter before the LORD; that is why it is said, "Like Nimrod, a mighty hunter before the LORD."

¹⁰ The first centres of his **kingdom** were **Babylon**, Uruk, Akkad and Kalneh, in Shinar. ¹¹ From that land he went to **Assyria**, where he built Nineveh, Rehoboth Ir, Calah ¹² and Resen, which is between Nineveh and Calah—which is the great city.

Warrior (*gib-bôr* in Hebrew) is the word used for *the heroes of old* (6:4) when people corrupted God's world with violence. Now God has authorized the community to take a killer's life (9:5-6), so Nimrod realizes he can use the power of death to subjugate people—making war.

God authorized killing for food (9:3), but Nimrod wasn't hunting animals. Nimrod hunts down to build kingdoms. That's what kingdoms do: from Nimrod to Alexander the Great, from Hitler to today's superpowers.

And the two kingdoms named in verses 10-11 are the ones that ultimately destroyed the nation God established through Abraham:

- In 722 BC, *Assyria* captured Israel, the northern kingdom (2 Kings 17);
- In 586 BC, *Babylon* captured what was left, the kingdom of Judah (2 Kings 25).

Israel recognized the nations and kingdoms that should recognize God's authority, but these kingdoms show no respect for what God had decreed for Israel. It's a tragedy that's never resolved in Old Testament times.

Your thoughts?

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So what?

After David's reign ceased (Psalm 89), the Psalms kept declaring the LORD's reign over all the earth (e.g. Psalm 98:2; 99:1; 102:15; 113:4). The prophets promised a son of David who would bring God's reign back to earth, with the nations under his reign (e.g. Isaiah 11:10; 19:23-25; 60:3; Micah 4:2; Zechariah 8:22).

The announcement that Jesus is *the Messiah* (God's anointed ruler) *is the good news* according to Mark 1:1. According to Jesus, *God's good news* was that *the time had come* for the restoration of God's reign, that *the kingdom of God had come near* (Mark 1:14-15). That's why the kingdom that claimed to run the world killed the *King of the Jews* (Mark 15:2, 9, 12, 18, 26).

That's when God overturned the power of death, raising him to life with *all authority in heaven and on earth* (Matthew 28:18). King Jesus now calls **all nations** under his kingship (Luke 24:47; Acts 1:8).

So, the nations that went their own way in Genesis 10 are now being called back into the kingdom of God that is formed in Christ. Heaven's gospel proclaims, *The kingdom of the world has become the kingdom of our Lord and his Messiah, and he will reign for ever and ever* (Revelation 11:15).

That's why Paul was called as *an apostle to the nations* (Romans 11:13; Galatians 2:8; 1 Timothy 2:7). Since God's anointed ruler (*the Christ*) had been raised up with authority over all peoples (*Lord of all*), Paul was sent to announce this *good news* to the *nations* (*Gentiles*). Jesus called him to "*proclaim my name to the nations and their kings and to the people of Israel*" (Acts 9:16).

In other words, **Paul's gospel**—the good news that King Jesus is Lord of all nations—is the announcement that **reverses Genesis 10**. The nations went their way, asserting their power through war. The Messiah restores peace to the earth, overturning national divisions, making peace by creating one new humanity in his leadership, reconciling humanity to God and to each other (Ephesians 2:14-16).

The gospel undoes the division of humanity that goes all the way back to Genesis 10. That's the significance of this unique chapter in our Bible.

Questions

So what do you make of **Genesis 9**? As God replants the world after the flood, what's the same as when God established heaven and earth in the beginning? And what's different?

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What do you make of the additional authority God gave Noah that wasn't there in the beginning?

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What do you make of the covenant God established with the humans the creatures and the earth?

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What do you make of Noah abusing that authority as slavery because of his shame?

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What is the significance of **Genesis 10** to the Bible story? Why does God let the nations go their own way at this point? How does that set up the story for the calling of Abraham and the establishment of a nation under God? And what is God's long-term plan to rescue the nations, and how is that fulfilled in the end?

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Going further

If you'd like to read further, here are some blog posts on Genesis 9–10:

- [Earthly government](#) (Genesis 9:1-6)
- [Capital punishment?](#) (Genesis 9:6)
- [God's commitment to reign](#) (Genesis 9:7-17)
- [Why slavery?](#) (Genesis 9:18-29)
- [Why war?](#) (Genesis 10)

In preparation for our final week, please **read Genesis 11–12**.