

Genesis 9

9:1 And God blessed Noah and his sons, and said to them, "Be fruitful and multiply, and fill the earth. **2** The fear of you and the dread of you shall be upon every beast of the earth, and upon every bird of the air, upon everything that creeps on the ground and all the fish of the sea; into your hand they are delivered.

"Be fruitful and multiply...." God's first words to humankind after the flood are to repeat to them what He had commanded when He first created them in Genesis 1. Does God understand that creation is beginning totally new or just that creation has been renewed? This new world order is not like Paradise, nor even like the world into which Adam and Eve were expelled and exiled; animals will now fear and dread the humans, not live at peace with them. In Genesis 2 Adam named the animals which showed he had power over them, but the animals did not dread the human. After the deluge, the animals which Noah had helped preserve from death in the flood are to be human food. Is this why God wanted Noah to preserve the life of all the animals because He knew in the post-flood world they would be human food?

Except for the brief time when the animals follow Noah into and out of the ark – when Noah was shepherding or rather animalherding all wildlife – never did the humans demonstrate their "dominion" over all other creatures. Now human "dominion over" is to be replaced by dread in the animals themselves. Humanity failed to do God's will, and in the connected world of creation the animals suffer from the failure. Soon in Genesis, humans will practice warfare where not only will animals dread the humans, but humans will dread other humans as they each attempt to lord it over, enslave or eliminate one another.

God blesses Noah and his sons which will present a textual problem later in 9:24-25 when Noah wants to curse his son Ham for lewd behavior but instead curses his grandson Canaan, perhaps because Noah doesn't want to curse one who had been blessed by God. Such tensions in any one human reveal that humans have the capacity for both good and evil. God has learned to work with this fact as is witnessed in the Gospel description of the behaviors and attitudes exhibited by the Twelve Apostles.

"God ... said to them, "Be fruitful and multiply ... Every moving thing that lives shall be food for you; and as I gave you the green plants, I give you everything." In the modern world we commonly separate our spiritual lives from all else that we do: We go to church, we do our prayers, we give to the poor, etc. All of these "spiritual" activities are somehow separated from our "regular" lives where we: watch TV, go out

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to eat at a restaurant, exercise, do housework, have sex. We live a very dualistic life and are quite comfortable with it. The Genesis account knows of no separation between the religious/spiritual and the secular/profane. Everything in Genesis is God's and everything is part of God's creation. From the beginning God spoke to the humans about what they could eat, and about their sexual lives, and about work. All that happens to the personages in the story is religious – there is nothing they do which is in any sense unrelated to God and to their spiritual lives. The challenge for all humans today is to reconnect all the disparate elements of our lives so that we experience wholeness in life again. How we behave at work, what we eat at supper, what interests we have, what skills we have, what friends we have, what knowledge we hold, what property we own, who we marry, how we treat our neighbors, are actually all related to God and to our relationship to God. God speaks to the first human beings not about heaven or hell (neither is mentioned in the early chapters of Genesis) but about this world and our relationship to it. Genesis 9:1-17 represents the longest speech from God to any human beings up to this point in the story. God speaks about life, death, eating, law, procreation, environment, and anthropology. Nothing that we humans do is outside of God's interest. To fail to see ourselves and our daily lives in relationship to God is to live exactly like the people of Noah's day did before the flood. Jesus taught, "As were the days of Noah, so will be the coming of the Son of man. For as in those days before the flood they were eating and drinking, marrying and giving in marriage, until the day when Noah entered the ark, and they did not know until the flood came and swept them all away, so will be the coming of the Son of man" (Matthew 24:37-39). Have we learned nothing by reading the narrative of Noah and the flood? What are we doing today? How should we be living? What difference did Jesus think the Noah story should make in our daily lives?

"The fear of you and the dread of you shall be upon every beast of the earth" Humans were created by God in Genesis 1 to have dominion over all of creation. Humans were originally envisioned to live at peace with all animals – none were carnivores. This is very much what Isaiah envisions for God's Kingdom: "The wolf and the **lamb shall feed together, the lion** shall eat straw like the ox; and dust shall be the serpent's food. They shall not hurt or destroy in

all my holy mountain, says the LORD" (Isaiah 65:25). But following the flood human rule is accomplished with and through fear and dread. The world though "restored" by God is a different world where carnivores dwell. God has promised never to destroy all of life on earth again, but He will allow the humans to slaughter animals even if He will not. It is no wonder fear and dread have come upon the animals – God has lifted His protection from them and left them at the mercy of the violent and vile humans!

"...into your hand they are delivered." The lives of the animals are placed at the mercy of the humans. God who saw the wickedness and violence of the humans before the flood, now entrusts the lives of all his creatures to these same humans. One has to wonder, Why? Has God seen a change in humanity which makes Him think humans can be entrusted with behaving responsibly toward the rest of creation? Or, is it possible that God is revealing a deistic tendency and is simply withdrawing from creation? Or is God putting full responsibility on the humans to make us fully accountable for all we do? The story is perhaps preparing us for the great and awesome Final Judgment. It does not offer a very satisfactory explanation as to why humans have delivered into their hands the lives of all other animals. Humans have not proven themselves very good stewards of God's generosity. God seems determined to place ever more responsibility on the humans.

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3 Every moving thing that lives shall be food for you; and as I gave you the green plants, I give you everything. **4** Only you shall not eat flesh with its life, that is, its blood.

The world after the flood is not a return to Paradise, nor even a renewal of the world immediately after the Fall. No longer are humans to be vegans, for God now puts into their hands the lives of every animal to be used as food. Humans have a new relationship with all other animals, not a renewed one. The Flood story in the P-Source did distinguish between clean and unclean animals; no such distinction is made at this point in the text. The ideas of kashrut (kosher) are not here established by God. However, God does place a serious limit on human blood lust. The permission to eat meat comes with a very controlling law. Humans are not to eat meat with its blood in it. Humans are not to eat raw meat, nor eat an animal while it is still alive. Unlike carnivorous wild beasts which tear flesh and limbs from their victims, humans must prepare their meat and show all due respect to the blood. The life of an animal is in its blood. The direct connection of each animal to the spiritual world is in its blood. Once again dualism is rejected. The physical blood is life – it is the very point of connection with the non-physical (spiritual) world. The text clearly shows that the physical world is sacred; the physical blood is life not mere cells, but is life. The distinction between the physical and the spiritual is intentionally blurred by God.

God's very first command to the people of the new world cleansed of sin deals with food just as it did in the original creation stories of Genesis 1 and 2. His first prohibition endeavors to get humans to respect life. We may eat meat, but the permission to do so is connected to a command to respect life. Wasteful slaughtering of animals is not blessed. Humans are to show appropriate recognition and respect for life, even animal life. The idea of the sanctity of life was never mentioned in Paradise, though probably assumed as all in Paradise was holy; only now when the killing of animals is permitted does God pointedly reveal the truth of the sacredness of all life.

Eating animal flesh while approved by God belongs only to the world after the flood. It did not belong to Paradise nor to the world before the flood; Biblically speaking, it is not completely natural to us. Eating meat is not an eternal value but belongs to the world which is passing away. Many find it a delicious pleasure to eat a good steak, yet eating meat is not an ultimate good but one approved originally for this fallen world only. It is a pleasure of the fallen world.

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Fast periods acknowledge that meat eating belongs to this world, and really will not and cannot commend us to God or bring about our salvation. There is nothing wrong with eating meat, but in fasting we deny that flesh eating is of eternal value and we admit it belongs only to this fallen world – and we do not live for this world alone. Man does not live by bread alone (Luke 4:4) and neither does he live by and for the eating of meat! Our roots and our true home are in paradise and our goal is God's heaven. We acknowledge in fasting that we belong to another world, a world beyond this fallen, carnivorous world; the ultimate values and good in the world-to-come do matter in this world. Fasting challenges our love for flesh eating – our “blood thirstiness” and says these carnivorous pleasures belong to this world. We can enjoy eating meat with thanksgiving, but we also must realize that this is part of our appetite in and for the fallen world. Despite our Paschal feasts with their lambs and hams, the foretaste of the Kingdom is the bloodless sacrifice we receive in the Holy Eucharist. Denying ourselves in the present world is a good that can lead to life in the world to come.

“...as I gave you the green plants, I give you everything. Only you shall not eat flesh with its life, that is, its blood.” In Genesis 2:16-17, God gave permission to the humans to freely eat of any of the trees of the Garden of Eden – with the firm exception of one tree. In doing this God imposed on the humans the one and only rule of Paradise. This one law we understand to be spiritually promoting self-control, self-denial, abstinence or fasting. God saw that it was good for humans to have access to the abundance of the fruits of the earth, to enjoy the abundance, but also for the humans to learn a limit, to learn that discipline is an important aspect of being “not God”, of being human. Now in Genesis 9:3-4, God is vastly expanding the food supply for humans. No longer are humans limited to eating the earth's harvest of fruits and vegetables, now every animal is added to the food supply. The end result of being expelled from Paradise because of our sin, of having the world being overwhelmed with destructive sinfulness, is that God increases the food supply! Humans are now far less “deprived” than ever, at least when it comes to edible resources. The world is no longer paradise, but God opens up to humans an entirely new food source in which many humans will delight and for which many will crave to enjoy. However,

while increasing the palatable pleasures for people, God once again in the midst of abundance imposes a rule of self-control and abstinence. We can eat meat to our heart's content, but we are not to eat it with its blood still in it. Certainly in the over sated and over fed modern existence, this should give us pause. What does God know that we don't understand? Why does God offer abundance and then tell us to practice self control? Medical doctor Peter Whybrow in his book, *AMERICAN MANIA: WHEN MORE IS NOT ENOUGH*, offers a health warning to Americans: “In times of material affluence, when desire is no longer constrained by limited resources, the evidence from our contemporary American experiment suggests that we humans have trouble setting limits to our instinctual craving.... there is considerable evidence suggesting that unchecked consumption fosters our social malaise, eroding our self-constraint and pulling the cultural pendulum toward excessive indulgence and greed” (pp 7-8). In other words, abundance does not seem to satisfy, it seems to increase the craving for more. We seem to need some external reminder that enough is enough and too much is too much. No wonder America is dotted with so many fast food places and diet and weight loss clinics.

“...lifeblood...” Right after Abel made his animal sacrifice; he is murdered by his brother Cain. Here after Noah's animal sacrifice God speaks to Noah about the sacredness of blood. Each person's blood – life is sacred. This law for all mankind demands an absolute adherence to the sanctity of human life. God lays down a rule that if anyone or even if any animal sheds a man's life, the murderer shall be put to death. God does not want Cain's sin to be down played or accepted. Murder is punishable by death. But this certainly reflects the fact that everything has changed on earth and none can live together in peace. God has accepted that the human heart apparently cannot be washed clean of its wickedness, but now He lays down a law forbidding murder. God does not prevent murder from happening (and His Son will suffer the consequence of His decision!), but His law demands that humans must control themselves. And if a human can't control himself and kills another human, the rest of the humans by God's command are to deal with the killer. This will become the foundation for Old Covenantal civil society. God does not offer nor promise to deal with human wickedness such as murder.

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Humans are to practice self control. But if they can't control themselves, then humans must band together and take control of the person who refuses to practice self-control. This is God's expectation of humanity – humans must begin to police themselves because God has ordered it. In the New Covenant, in the new order, in the new world instituted by Jesus Christ however, on the cross He does not demand Old Covenantal justice, rather He prays, "Father, forgive them; for they know not what they do" (Luke 23:34). He inaugurates a new Kingdom not of this world, nor of its values, not even of the ones from the Torah.

"Only you shall not eat flesh with its life, that is, its blood." God forbids the eating of flesh with blood still in it even before Moses exists and he is given the law from God to teach to the people. Genesis puts this law as one of the first laid down by God for all people – not just for observant Jews, for the law is given before Abraham or Moses lived. It is interesting that in Acts 15 when the Apostles are considering what religious laws Gentile converts to Christianity must keep, they adopt only three rules mandatory for all Christians and one of them is the Genesis 9:4 prohibition against eating meat with blood still in it: "abstain from the pollutions of idols and from unchastity and from what is strangled and from blood" (Acts 15:20). They do not require all 613 laws of the Torah, nor even the Ten Commandments! This same set of rules is repeated in Acts 21:25. To be a Christian, you do not need to be an observant Jew – no requirements for keeping Torah nor kosher. But Gentile Christians were expected to recognize the universality of certain moral laws.

"Only you shall not eat flesh with its life, that is, its blood." One lesson God may have wanted to convey to the survivors of the flood is that life is still sacred. They get out of the ark and witness the mass devastation which has taken place – all flesh has been destroyed. But God doesn't want the survivors to misunderstand the events. All flesh was destroyed because of the distortions brought about by wickedness. The destruction of all flesh was not a pronouncement that life has no value, nor that God favors ethnic cleansing or endorses mass murder. God affirms the value, the sanctity of life by telling the humans the blood is holy, life is sacred. God wanted the survivors of the flood, and all who

read their story to learn that sacredness is still part of creation. They may no longer be living in the Holy Paradise of Eden. They may no longer be residing in the antediluvian world of Noah's forefathers. This however has not changed the holiness of life itself. Meat eating is allowed, but humans must recognize the sacredness of all life and the sanctity of every human life. God wants the humans He has saved to understand this most significant lesson. The significance of the story is not that there is now law governing human behavior; the importance of the story is that life is holy, and in the face of the destruction of all life by the flood, humans must be told that God still sees life as sacred and He expects His chosen humans to do the same. God will say that He will never again destroy all human life to rid the world of evil and sin; nor does He command His humans to try this method to perfect their world.

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5 For your lifeblood I will surely require a reckoning; of every beast I will require it and of man; of every man's brother I will require the life of man. **6** Whoever sheds the blood of man, by man shall his blood be shed; for God made man in his own image. **7** And you, be fruitful and multiply, bring forth abundantly on the earth and multiply in it."

"...I will surely require a reckoning..." Though God's heart was grief stricken by seeing the wickedness in humans, God had not before the flood laid down many laws for the humans to follow. If He hoped they would use their free will solely for the good of one another, the humans had totally disappointed Him. But when God was totally distraught with the humans, He suddenly brought judgment on them and wiped out all by His chosen remnant. In this text God clearly lays down that there are rules to be followed, and that humans will be held accountable for their behavior. If the humans before this law were held accountable for what they did, now God clearly warns of consequences for human behavior – His judgment. "All who have sinned without the law will also perish without the law, and all who have sinned under the law will be judged by the law. For it is not the hearers of the law who are righteous before God, but the doers of the law who will be justified" (Romans 2:12-13).

"...of every man's brother I will require the life of man..." The prohibition of killing one's brother comes too late to save Abel. It also is the first suggestion that brotherhood means responsibility for one's brother, and that all men are brothers.

"Whoever sheds the blood of man, by man shall his blood be shed..." This is the first retributive justice law prescribing the death penalty for those who commit murder. Was murder in fact a common form of violence that God so hated before the flood? Is it possible that God realizing that the human heart is full of evil concludes that murderers must be stopped or they themselves will wipe out humanity even though God has decided never to wipe out the human race again? God sees the need for greater restraints on humans – more laws, more severe punishments. God respects human free will, but imposes more consequences for the choices humans make. God rejects Lamech's 77 fold law of vengeance (Genesis 4:24) and imposes only one death for each murder committed. Because this law is given long before there was the 10 Commandments, some commentators feel this is a universal law established by God, and not the Law of Moses which is obligatory only for Jews.

"Whoever sheds the blood of man, by man shall his blood be shed.." It is up to humans to

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cleanse themselves of murderers. God's command shows that we do share a common humanity and are social beings. Whatever happens to any one individual is the concern of all humans; we are social beings and have social responsibilities. Humans must enforce this law and execute the killers. We each have a responsibility for and to all other humans – to protect life, to maintain the peace, to enforce order. We are not simply individuals – we have a relationship to and responsibility for all other humans and for human civility. We have a responsibility to establish and enforce justice. We have a responsibility to rid ourselves of violent evil. Humans must police themselves to maintain order and to punish killers. God's commandments do impose on humans a social order for the common good. In Genesis discerning right and wrong arises not from democracy but from revelation.

"Whoever sheds the blood of man, by man shall his blood be shed; for God made man in his own image." The rationale for the death penalty somehow is related to our being in God's image and likeness. "... for God made man in his own image..." The rationale for not killing other humans is an issue of human dignity – each of us is made in the image of God. We are not to deface the image of God on earth. There is an intrinsic value in every human being. The prohibition on killing is not only a matter of self restraint; it is a matter of recognizing the God-established value that each human possesses. Genesis rejects a purely utilitarian evaluation of humans. The value of a human is not determined by his or her net worth, nor by how much he or she contributes to society, nor by what value society attributes to them. Each human conceived has value because each is in God's image and likeness.

St. Isaac the Syrian (d. ca. 700 AD) said that Christians cannot come to understand the teachings of Christ "through the discipline of the justice of the Law. In the latter there is 'an eye for an eye' and 'a stripe for a stripe', and so forth. But the grace of Christ commands, 'Overcome evil with good,' that is, 'whosoever shall smite you on your right cheek, turn to him the other also..." For Christians Christ's commands and teachings of love supersede the legal demands of justice of the Old Testament.

"Whoever sheds the blood of man, by man shall his blood be shed.." There is a logical problem in this statement. If we are to take the statement absolutely literally without imposing a rational interpretation on it, wouldn't this lead to the ultimate extinction of everyone? Every executioner who sheds blood would also have to be executed by another human who in turn would be guilty of bloodshed. This is another lesson in learning that a literal reading of the text is an interpretation of the text. The text itself does not tell us to be reasonable; it simply gives us the Law. We need to interpret the text in order to understand it.

"And you, be fruitful and multiply, bring forth abundantly on the earth and multiply in it." Though the verses preceding this one focus a great deal on capital punishment for murderers, here God turns to what seems to be His real concern – that humans be fruitful and multiply. Despite setting strict laws for dealing with murderers, God's main focus is not on setting (arbitrary) rules for humans. God is mostly concerned with the humans having abundant life – being life giving and life protecting. As the Lord Jesus Christ said, "I came that they may have life, and have it abundantly" (John 10:10).

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8 Then God said to Noah and to his sons with him, **9** "Behold, I establish my covenant with you and your descendants after you, **10** and with every living creature that is with you, the birds, the cattle, and every beast of the earth with you, as many as came out of the ark. **11** 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." **2** And God said, "This is the sign of the covenant which I make between me and you and every living creature that is with you, for all future generations: **13** I set my bow in the cloud, and it shall be a sign of the covenant between me and the earth. **14** When I bring clouds over the earth and the bow is seen in the clouds, **15** I will remember my covenant which 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. **16** When the bow is in the clouds, I will look upon it and remember the everlasting covenant between God and every living creature of all flesh that is upon the earth." **17** God said to Noah, "This is the sign of the covenant which I have established between me and all flesh that is upon the earth."

In 9:8 God is speaking to Noah AND to his sons which is the first time they too are included in "hearing" the invisible God; so however Noah was able to hear and understand God, now too His sons hear God speaking to them. In 9:17 God appears to be speaking to Noah alone, if the text is to be read literally.

This is the first explicit covenant between God and Noah. A covenant is an agreement that binds together two parties that otherwise would be separated. As a result of the Fall humans had become not only separated from God, but even alienated from Him and had become at enmity with Him. The covenant endeavors to heal the division and to bind God to humanity again specifically through His chosen servant Noah and Noah's descendants. In this sense the covenant is with Noahian humanity, not just with the man Noah alone. (Because a covenant "binds together" two parties who might not share a natural union, we can understand how the incarnation of God in Jesus Christ is then a New Covenant). The Genesis 9 covenant asks nothing of the humans and is extended to all of creation (though in the earlier verses :1-7, God promised a blessing to humanity and laid down specific laws regarding not eating the blood of animals and demanding societal punishment upon any who kill other humans). God promises never to destroy humanity or the earth again, no matter what. In Isaiah 54:9, God promises to remember His covenant with Noah and not to entirely annihilate faithless Israel. Noah is the prototype of the faithful remnant who exist in every generation and whom God will remember. "Noah was found perfect and righteous; in the time of wrath he was taken in exchange; therefore a remnant was left to the earth when the flood came. Everlasting covenants were made with him that all flesh should not be blotted out by a flood" (Sirach 44:17-18). As stated in the text, this covenant is also a covenant of hope because it makes certain promises about God's future relationship with all humans. Hope for the humans is also a trust in the unseen future. We will not know if God will stay faithful to His promise to "never again" destroy the earth until time has come to an end. The Covenant for us is thus an agreement of faith. As Hebrews 11:13, 39-40 attests: "These all died in faith, not having received what was promised, but having seen it and greeted it from afar, and having acknowledged that they were strangers and exiles on the earth. ... And all these, though well attested by their faith, did not

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receive what was promised, since God had foreseen something better for us, that apart from us they should not be made perfect.” We await the fulfillment of God’s eternal promise.

The Covenant. God makes a covenantal promise to never again destroy the earth and all humans by another flood – the rainbow becomes the sign of that covenant. But did God leave Himself a loophole? He won’t destroy the world with a flood, but might He use something else – say fire – to destroy the earth? In Genesis 8:21, “the LORD said in his heart, ‘I will never again curse the ground because of man, for the imagination of man’s heart is evil from his youth; neither will I ever again destroy every living creature as I have done.’” God seems to rule out ever again destroying all humankind. He recognizes the human heart is full of evil from the time we are children. But His covenantal promise to never totally destroy the earth again would also seem to apply to whatever God plans for His final Judgment Day. Of course in Genesis 8:22, God may have made conditional this promise when He said, “While the earth remains, seedtime and harvest, cold and heat, summer and winter, day and night, shall not cease.” The condition being that as long as the earth exists God will not destroy it. He doesn’t promise that the earth will always exist, but certainly in the New Testament there is much indication that God plans to transfigure the earth at the end of time, not destroy it. In the Beatitudes for example we read that the meek will inherit the earth (Matthew 5:5) – what kind of blessing is that if the earth is to be destroyed anyway? And how is the rainbow an everlasting covenant if “everlasting” means only for a time? Being asked by the Pharisees when the kingdom of God was coming, Jesus answered them, “The kingdom of God is not coming with signs to be observed ... for behold, the kingdom of God is in the midst of you. ... As it was in the days of Noah, so will it be in the days of the Son of man. They ate, they drank, they married, they were given in marriage, until the day when Noah entered the ark, and the flood came and destroyed them all” (Luke 17:20-21,26-27). The Kingdom of God is in our midst – it is not far away “in heaven” nor does it require the annihilation of the earth for it to be established. The promise of God in Genesis never to destroy all life again is everlasting. And while God explicitly promises never to destroy all of life again, He never denies the possibility of someday glorifying humanity.

God’s promise to never again destroy the earth and to accept as “inevitable” the wickedness in the human heart means God is willing to accept suffering because of and for His creatures. In deciding to preserve humans rather than annihilate them, God decides to accept having a continuously grieving heart as part of allowing humans to continue to exist. God in effect accepts His own having to suffer as a necessary part of His love for His creation. God can see humans will continue to cause Him pain, and He accepts that as the price He has to pay for having such creatures on His earth. Allowing the continuance of the human race for God means bearing with the wickedness of humanity and accepting the pain which humans cause Him in his heart.

“...and with every living creature...” God’s covenant has a global dimension to it. The covenant is not limited to humans for even non-rational animals are included in it. The rainbow reminds God that His covenant extends to all animals too. The protection of life guaranteed in the covenant broadly includes all humans, not just Jews, males, righteous saints, the good, or believers; God’s love and concern encompasses every human being without exception and unconditionally. The covenant is not limited to rational creatures, to believers, to the rich, to the educated, nor to those who have reached the age of reason. This divine testament is truly “on behalf of all and for all.” And why shouldn’t it include animals? In Psalm 148, one of the Psalms of praises, we call upon not only animals but even inanimate objects to praise God: “Praise the LORD from the earth, you sea monsters and all deeps, fire and hail, snow and frost, stormy wind fulfilling his command! Mountains and all hills, fruit trees and all cedars! Beasts and all cattle, creeping things and flying birds!” (148:7-10)

The Rainbow. Because the ancients tended to believe the sky/heavens was a solid boundary (they had no instruments to examine them closely), they had no modern concept of what the lights in the heavens were exactly (remember they had no electricity so did not and could not see the stars as light bulbs of some sort). The only things they knew created light were the sun and the stars and the moon and fire. But the stars in heaven gave a more perfect light unlike any fire on earth. The moon glowed. The light of the sun was hot – that they

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could observe. But what the source of the light was, they could only speculate. The appearance of a rainbow in heaven was equally mystifying as it was always above them, and could not be explained by human reason.

“bow in the cloud” Though modern people tend to see the rainbow as something beautiful, the word “bow” is the word for the weapon “bow” which any archer would use (“weapon” in fact is its only meaning in the bible). It was a beautiful bow and a sign of a promised peace, but it was seen as a weapon by the biblical authors – a sign of God’s power and anger too. The author of the text has no understanding of the rainbow as a natural phenomenon caused by water droplets refracting light causing the spectrum of light to appear. He assumes that the first appearance of a rainbow was after the flood – thus all rainbows are miraculous signs, not natural phenomenon.

“When the bow is in the clouds, I will look upon it and remember the everlasting covenant...” The rainbow is to be a sign to God, not the humans! When God sees the bow, he promises it will remind Him of the covenant He has made. When we see the rainbow in the sky, we might consider we are looking at the very same thing which God is looking at that very moment as well. We both share a common vision of at least one thing in creation. And if every time God sees the rainbow He is reminded of His covenant with humanity, how much more might we expect God to recognize His peace with us everytime He sees the cross, the sign of God’s New covenant with humanity.

Noah and his sons are totally silent and do not respond to God’s covenant promise – they ask no questions, make no reciprocal promises; no response of theirs even gets recorded, so we have no idea what they thought about God’s speaking let alone His covenant. In verse :18, they already seem to be going about their business as if nothing happened. They do not thank God for His promise and they make no promise themselves to in any way honor the covenant. God had demanded of them some level of civilization before stating the terms of the covenant. God laid down that killing other humans is unacceptable and that humans themselves must enforce the ban on killing by executing anyone who commits homicide. In effect God is demanding them to develop their

own police force, judicial system, and executioners. What God precludes is both unlimited vengeance as well as tolerance of murderous violence. God has recognized that the human heart’s tendency toward violence is real and will continue. But God is not going to be the one who has to tame the wickedness in fallen humanity. God appoints His humans to this task – this is now to be part of humans having dominion over creation: they must enforce dominion over their own hearts and over any tempted to murder. God places the burden on humans to police themselves. God has promised not to destroy humanity for its violent wickedness, but insists that humans deal with homicide by killing the murderers. Executing justice turns out to be a very unsavory business. Humans now are going to be forced to use the punishment God put upon them for the sin of Eve and Adam – mortality – to establish justice on earth. God has already seen how humans twist around God-given punishment by making mortality a tool of sinful murder. Now God is demanding of humans to use mortality wisely and judiciously to establish justice and to contain violence. God is curtailing the human proclivity to vengeance but is demanding that humans must rid themselves of murderers. If humans are going to live together they must choose to control the homicidal tendencies of their hearts. If humans want to continue to have a relationship with the divine, God is insisting that the humans must be willing to purify themselves of violent evil. Unfortunately this too humans will distort with the rise of armies and warfare in which killing is sanctioned by human civilization not just in defense but in offensive aggression and pre-emptive warfare. While God sanctioned the death penalty for murderers, He does not demand humans to kill the violent before they sin.

In the Orthodox Prayer Service (Slavonic: *Molieben*) “in the time of inclement weather, and unseasonable rain”, we find the following petition: “That He will remember His covenant which He made with Noah, and will not despoil the land and His needy people with grievous wetness, dark, malevolent skies and gloomy fog, but will mercifully spare His inheritance and will command the sun to shine on the earth with fruit-bearing rays and abundant warmth, let us pray to the Lord.” From that same service there is also this petition (note this prayer asks God to make a new covenant with the petitioners – either assuming God frequently makes

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covenants with His people and one can petition for a covenant and/or that the covenant with Noah was not eternal but must be remade from time to time): "Save us from mud, O Lord, and from deep mire, and from deep water, that our days not pass in vanity and our years with sighing. But remember Your covenant, which You made with Noah, and make one with us, according to Your mercies, with broken hearts we pray to You, hearken and have mercy." From the Prayer Service "in time of flood", we find this prayer: "That He will remember the covenant that He made with Noah and not destroy us with grievous wetness and the stormy breath of winds, but will mercifully spare His inheritance and appease the storm that is laid upon us and the disturbance of the air, and will give a seasonable and peaceful breath to the wind, let us pray to the Lord."

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18 The sons of Noah who went forth from the ark were Shem, Ham, and Japheth. Ham was the father of Canaan. **19** These three were the sons of Noah; and from these the whole earth was peopled. **20** Noah was the first tiller of the soil. He planted a vineyard; **21** and he drank of the wine, and became drunk, and lay uncovered in his tent. **22** And Ham, the father of Canaan, saw the nakedness of his father, and told his two brothers outside. **23** Then Shem and Japheth took a garment, laid it upon both their shoulders, and walked backward and covered the nakedness of their father; their faces were turned away, and they did not see their father's nakedness.

Shem, son of Noah, holds special honor in both the biblical tradition and in the Orthodox sacramental tradition. In the Wedding Service of the Crowning, we invoke this blessing on the wedding couple: "Remember them, O Lord our God, as You remembered Enoch, Shem, Elijah." Shem is remembered between the two men of the Old Testament who were taken by God and whose deaths are not recorded in the Scriptures. God's remembering His saints is the same as His blessing them and safely protecting them from harm and evil. Somewhat unexpectedly the survivors of the flood are invoked several times in the Sacrament of Marriage. In the Wedding service we want God to bless the wedding couple and to see their righteousness as He saw the righteousness of Enoch, Shem and Elijah. Both Noah and Shem, two men who found refuge in the ark from the cataclysmic flood which destroyed the world, are both invoked in the prayers of the Sacrament of Holy Matrimony. The story of the flood is used in the Orthodox Church to invoke blessings on newlyweds. A good trivia question: In which sacrament of the Orthodox Church are the people on Noah's ark remembered? I wonder how many would guess that Noah and flood are so connected to the sacrament of marriage. What does it say about our understanding of life for newlyweds in this world?

"Noah was the first tiller of the soil. He planted a vineyard ..." Genesis 4:2 told us that Cain was a tiller of the ground, so in what sense is Noah the first tiller of the soil? The story has him being the first to have a vineyard, and some think the story only implies that he was the first husbandman. We had not yet been told that humans ate grapes, but apparently they have already learned the art of fermenting the grapes. This is also the first mention of wine and of drunkenness. Prior to this the only wickedness detailed by Genesis was violence. Though no mention of wine occurred before this reference, obviously Noah acted with intention in planting a vineyard – he somehow knew the product he wanted to produce. (Chrysostom excuses Noah thinking Noah was [pleasantly] surprised by the drink he could produce from grapes. St. John assumes Noah was depressed as every where he looked there would have seen the dead carcasses of humans and animals left by the flood). The text has so far not spoken about or against alcohol nor alcohol abuse (drunkenness). God has not warned the humans of the potential dangers of alcohol

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abuse just as He had not warned Eve and Adam about the dangers of talking to the serpent. Does God think experimenting, discovery, learning by experience, and mastering desire are valuable for His free willed humans? Has God continued to assume the humans would practice self control? The Bible is circumspect in detailing what happened here but certainly implies that Ham in seeing his drunken father naked perhaps saw something lewd but more likely engaged in a lewd act far beyond voyeurism. Noah upon waking from his drunken stupor immediately knew what his son “had done to him” (:24). Noah wouldn’t have known if Ham had only looked – he felt or could see that something had been done to him. The text modestly avoids detailing what may have been an incestuous and homosexual act.

“he drank of the wine, and became drunk...” According to Psalm 104:14, God gave “wine to gladden the heart of man.” Wine is meant to serve a good purpose, but like the rest of creation it is subject to abuse by fallen humanity.

Chrysostom remarks that after the flood things were totally different for Noah – he is introduced to a carnivorous diet, and discovers wine as a new drink. Chrysostom goes on to say that wine was the first medicine invented by humans – it helped reduce the pain which Noah felt by realizing his world had been destroyed.

Chrysostom says wine is not in itself evil, but intemperance always leads to sin. He also notes that since Noah was the first to get drunk, drunkenness is reported only after the flood occurred and therefore must not have been one of the sins that led to God destroying the world through the flood. “I mean, voluntary intoxication is really a demon, clouding the intellect more severely than any demon, and robbing its victim of any sense of values.... The drunk, on the other hand, does not deserve excuse, no matter what he does.” Chrysostom has no pity for the drunk who he believes chooses his evil ways. Chrysostom does not have our modern sense of uncontrollable alcoholism but only the person who willingly “surrendered himself to the tyranny of drunkenness.” He does see drunkenness as a tyrant, but drunkenness is still chosen sin. “The fact of sinning is not so harmful as persisting in sin.” Chrysostom was a firm believer in free will and did not hold to ideas of predestination to sin, nor of genetic predetermination toward an

illness. He sees humans as making their choices, some of which lead to slavery to sin, but that is the end result of an unwillingness to resist temptation or evil.

“became drunk...” Though Noah is considered righteous by God, this does not mean sinless. Noah commits sin in his drunkenness. Christ alone is said in scripture to be without sin (Hebrews 4:5), and later Christian thinking also attributes sinlessness to the Theotokos. In the Orthodox funeral service the priest says, “there is no one who lives and does not sin, for You (Christ) only are without sin and Your righteousness is to all eternity.” God sees the hearts of each of us and judges our hearts. He works with those who love and fear Him, even if they do on occasion sin against Him. Noah’s moral lapse does not cancel God’s seeing him as righteous. God is realistic in dealing with humans – He knows their hearts are inclined to evil, but He also is able to distinguish between a moral lapse and defiant evil.

“Ham... saw the nakedness of his father.” Ham reveals his true nature – shamelessness. Genesis traces the history of humanity through the relationship of father to son, but it makes comment neither about the role and responsibility of a father nor that of the son. Be that as it may, whatever human wisdom or tradition exists is being handed down through these relationships. Suddenly in the story of Ham, we are confronted with another reality. Cain committed fratricide against Abel. But for the first time since Adam and Eve rebelled against God in Paradise, a son is reported to commit an offense against his father. And the depraved and base offense appears to involve something incestuous and lewd. And whatever it is, Ham is shameless, for he does not try to hide his offense but rather calls his brothers to see as well. And now the brothers for the first time witness their father having been humiliated. The story shows the collapse of natural relationships, the collapse of respect, and the existence of shamelessness, lewdness, as well as wicked sexual abuse. A new kind of evil has been unleashed within humanity. And Shem and Japheth in shock can do nothing more than cover the nakedness of their father. They are shamed and embarrassed for their father’s humiliation. They do not even want to look upon what has happened. And yet they do nothing to their younger brother, but await their father’s sobering up from his drunken stupor to discover

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what has been done to him. Either in respect for their father's authority, or lacking the will to deal with the offense, they leave it up to their father to deal with the evil which has occurred. Is it possible that they were in such shock to realize that though God had saved them from the wickedness of the world by means of the ark and the flood, that they witness and realize Ham has now committed the same old sins in the newly purified world? The darkest abuse and violation in a family has occurred. Natural relationships have been destroyed. Two brothers are called in to be voyeuristic witnesses to the indignation and they are so shamed that they will not even look but want to cover it up – and then let their father deal with it.

Ham looking on the nakedness of Noah - Chrysostom blames him as a total ingrate. Noah saved his life by taking him on the ark, but Ham sees the drunkenness of his father and instead of covering his father's nakedness he brings his brothers to show them how their father has fallen and to mock his father.

"Noah's son Ham failed to conceal his father's nakedness, and even dared to look at him in his shame. And you, O my soul, in your treatment of your neighbor have imitated him." (Tuesday, Canon of St. Andrew of Crete) Do we not do the same when we fail to protect the victims of sexual abuse but have a voyeuristic desire to know the details of the story? Noah was unconscious and defenseless, and Ham does not offer him aid but takes advantage of his father's weakness. This is the nature of much abuse that goes on in families. The abusers indeed want to cover their offenses, but not to protect the abused, but to enable the abuse to continue. Interesting how shameful and shameless acts are so related.

"...covered the nakedness of their father..." Shem and Japheth demonstrate a degree of modesty, human decency and filial love that is totally lacking in Ham. They are not drawn into their brother's sin and have nothing to do with him either. Shem and Japheth reveal something of their own character and nobility. Though they are aware of their father's drunkenness, they do not take advantage of their father's sinful weakness, nor are they willing to expose him to ridicule, but are moved to cover the sin of their father. Their action may be in agreement with the Apostle Peter's own words, "love covers a

multitude of sins" (1 Peter 4:8). They are not ashamed of their father but are embarrassed for him and will not hold him up to ridicule. Despite the total depravity they have witnessed – their father's drunken stupor and their brother's lewdness – they endeavor to do the right thing to protect their father's reputation and to remain in a proper and respectful relationship to him. They do not exploit the sinful weakness of their father and endeavor to protect him from the son/brother who is quite willing to take shameful and sinful advantage of Noah's weakness.

"...covered the nakedness of their father..." Though the text seems to indicate that Ham did something to his father Noah, it is possible that the text is implying not a homosexual liaison, but that Ham defiled his mother. The clue for this interpretation comes from Leviticus. First we read in Leviticus 18:7: "You shall not uncover the nakedness of your father, which is the nakedness of your mother. Then, Leviticus 20:11 reads: "The man who lies with his father's wife has uncovered his father's nakedness" (Leviticus 20:11). Because the wording of the Leviticus texts are identical with Genesis 9:23, it is possible that what is suggested is that Ham invaded his father's tent, while his father was intoxicated and he committed incest with Noah's wife (who we would assume is his own mother since Genesis has not indicated that Noah had more than one wife). This explanation is made more intriguing because just before the Law is laid down forbidding uncovering the nakedness of any relative, God said this: "you shall not do as they do in the land of Canaan" (i.e., the land of Ham's son). The Leviticus Law against uncovering the nakedness of a relative (another biblical euphemisms for "have sex with") is offered in contrast to what they do in the land of Canaan. Leviticus connects such incestuous sin with Canaan. Whether homosexual or heterosexual, the Genesis account of Ham connects him to incest and a total breakdown of morality and a family code. And Leviticus clearly connects this behavior to the land of Canaan, not to Ham. While this explanation has some merit, other events in the story tend to indicate Ham did something directly to Noah.

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24 When Noah awoke from his wine and knew what his youngest son had done to him, **25** he said, "Cursed be Canaan; a slave of slaves shall he be to his brothers." **26** He also said, "Blessed by the LORD my God be Shem; and let Canaan be his slave." **27** God enlarge Japheth, and let him dwell in the tents of Shem; and let Canaan be his slave." **28** After the flood Noah lived three hundred and fifty years. **29** All the days of Noah were nine hundred and fifty years; and he died.

"When Noah awoke from his wine..." Many a drunk and alcoholic awakens from his alcohol induced stupor to discover to his/her shame and horror all manners of sin, evil, destruction and loss that he/she has caused or suffered. "Wine is a mocker, strong drink a brawler; and whoever is led astray by it is not wise" (Proverbs 20:1). "Who has woe? Who has sorrow? Who has strife? Who has complaining? Who has wounds without cause? Who has redness of eyes? Those who tarry long over wine, those who go to try mixed wine. Do not look at wine when it is red, when it sparkles in the cup and goes down smoothly. At the last it bites like a serpent, and stings like an adder. Your eyes will see strange things, and your mind utter perverse things. You will be like one who lies down in the midst of the sea, like one who lies on the top of a mast. 'They struck me,' you will say, 'but I was not hurt; they beat me, but I did not feel it. When shall I awake? I will seek another drink'" (Proverbs 23:29-35).

"...knew what his youngest son had done to him..." Noah has been violated in an awful way. He knows it – can feel it. No one tells him about it. He knew immediately upon waking from his drunken stupor that he had been violated not just viewed. Noah may have been drunk, but Ham was sober when he violated his father. While drunkenness is not an acceptable excuse for sinning, sin intentionally committed by a person in their right mind is a much more offensive fault. Additionally he commits the heinous act upon a person who is unconscious. Can it get worse than that? Yes, the person was his own father.

"Cursed be Canaan..." Ancient curses were never understood as mere words, but are always active and have a powerful (negative) effect on the cursed.

For the first time in Genesis, Noah, God's righteous one, speaks, and his first words are a curse! He curses his grandson, in what seems to be an egregiously unfair act. It is possible the Noah's curse on his grandson stems from the fact that when Noah sobers up and can feel what his son Ham did to him, he curses Ham's son, Canaan, so that Ham can know what Noah feels – what it is like to have a son who is wicked and cursed. Even the Patristic writers recognized Noah's curse as being patently unjust. As mentioned in the comments on

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Genesis 9:1, Noah perhaps felt he could not curse Ham because Ham had been blessed by God. But so outraged was Noah that he strikes angrily at Ham by cursing Ham's son. Many a parent would rather be the one blamed and cursed for a fault than to let that curse/punishment fall on their child. Ham listens to his own son being cursed for what he himself had done. Would this not have sickened and crushed him? He may have thought it clever and funny to "expose" his father's failure and drunkenness; now, the table is suddenly turned and his own failure as son is exposed to the detriment of his own child. He must have felt severely punished by such a curse so unfairly falling on his own son. Canaan is unfairly cursed and handicapped due to no fault of his own. Canaan truly suffers for the sin of his father. Chrysostom thinks Ham would have felt more punished by having the curse fall on his son rather than falling on himself. Ham is given no opportunity to repent or seek forgiveness. What horror he must have felt when he realized his child was doomed to servility and slavery. Chrysostom writes, "...consider the grave evil sin is... behold the man sharing the same birth pangs as his brothers, born of the same womb, yet made their slave by the onset of sin, robbed of his freedom and brought into subjection—hence the origin of his subsequent condition of servitude. Before this, you see, there was not such indulgence, people being pampered in this way and needing others to minister to their needs; rather, each one looked to his own needs, there being great equality of esteem and complete absence of discrimination. When sin entered the scene, on the contrary, it impaired freedom, destroyed the worth inherent in nature and introduced servitude so as to provide constant instruction and reminder to the human race to shun the servitude of sin while returning to the freedom of virtue." Slavery and discrimination are not part of the natural order of God's world. Humans were not created to be servants of other humans but all were created equal – to be helpers to one another not servants and slaves to others. It is interesting that Chrysostom talks of equality and that servitude is the result of sin. Apparently he did not think women were originally created to be servants of men either. The Fall has corrupted every human relationship. Power and control over others is a result of sin, not a normal part of God's order for humanity. Still, God will not allow the humans to suffer something that He is not willing to take on Himself. God's Son also

takes on the role of servant when He comes into the world. "Have this mind among yourselves, which is yours in Christ Jesus, who, though he was in the form of God, did not count equality with God a thing to be grasped, but emptied himself, taking the form of a servant, being born in the likeness of men. And being found in human form he humbled himself and became obedient unto death, even death on a cross" (Philippians 2:5). The incarnate God, Jesus Christ, becomes a servant in order to save us. He also models for us the way of life which is the way of God's love. "When (Jesus) had washed their feet, and taken his garments, and resumed his place, he said to them, "Do you know what I have done to you? You call me Teacher and Lord; and you are right, for so I am. If I then, your Lord and Teacher, have washed your feet, you also ought to wash one another's feet. For I have given you an example, that you also should do as I have done to you" (John 13:12-15). "For the Son of man also came not to be served but to serve, and to give his life as a ransom for many" (Mark 10:45). Human slavery and servitude is the result of the Fall. God however, will use servitude to accomplish the salvation of the human race just as He uses death, another result of the Fall.

"Cursed be Canaan; a slave of slaves shall he be..." Though Noah curses his grandson, Canaan, to be a slave to his brothers, in Psalm 105:27, Egypt is referred to as the land of Ham where ironically it will not be Canaan who will be enslaved, but where the descendents of the blessed Shem will be enslaved by the descendents of Ham.

Genesis connects slavery to sin, a theme picked up by St. Paul: "Do you not know that if you yield yourselves to any one as obedient slaves, you are slaves of the one whom you obey, either of sin, which leads to death, or of obedience, which leads to righteousness? But thanks be to God, that you who were once slaves of sin have become obedient from the heart to the standard of teaching to which you were committed, and, having been set free from sin, have become slaves of righteousness. ...But now that you have been set free from sin and have become slaves of God, the return you get is sanctification and its end, eternal life. For the wages of sin is death, but the free gift of God is eternal life in Christ Jesus our Lord" (Romans 6:16-18,22-23).

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Chrysostom did not believe that the **original sin** doomed us all to sin. "If, however, we are on the alert, these evils that came into life as a result of the sins of our forbearers will in no way be able to harm us, going no further than the level of terminology." We are not somehow predetermined to be sinners by what Adam or any of our ancestors have done. Humans can resist sin, but it requires great vigilance and determination. We are not predestined to sin. In his thinking St. John follows the wisdom of Sirach: "It was he who created man in the beginning, and he left him in the power of his own inclination. If you will, you can keep the commandments, and to act faithfully is a matter of your own choice. He has placed before you fire and water: stretch out your hand for whichever you wish. Before a man are life and death, and whichever he chooses will be given to him" (Sirach 15:14-17).

"Blessed by the LORD my God be Shem..." Noah's second sentence is not so much a blessing on his two other sons, but an acknowledgement that God has blessed them (9:1). Canaan, Ham's son is cursed to become slave to his uncles. He is not to be treated as kin but as chattel. He is disinherited from the family tree. What did Ham feel when he realized what effect his sin had on his son's life and fate? No reaction is recorded of how the sons responded to their father's blessings and curse.

When Noah dies, Abram the next major hero of Genesis is already born. Noah is the 10th generation from Adam, and Abram is the 10th generation from Noah. Noah's was the first birth recorded after Adam's death. So Noah's life stretches virtually from the time of Adam's death until the time of Abram's birth. He is thus a key figure in the genealogy connecting the father of mankind Adam who was a man of great promise to the father of the people of God's promise Abraham. Adam, Noah and Abraham thus each in their own way become the father of us all.