

Leadership And Covenants (Part Nine)

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With overwhelming evidence, the Bible shows that the relationships between God and His covenant people, with a few exceptions, did not result in good leadership in Israelite communities. Underlying their rather obvious lack of leadership is that the majority of Israelite leaders could not sustain belief in God, setting extremely poor examples before the people throughout their existence as a nation. This idea has strongly motivated me to search into the various covenants God has proposed and made with mankind.

Ezekiel and Hosea portray Israel as an unfaithful wife, a whorish woman married to a patient, faithful, well-providing, and loving Husband. By contrast, Israel wanders all over the place, holding no serious or responsible thoughts of duty and loyalty to her commitments. In Israel's history, for every Abel or Abraham who believed God and was faithful to Him, there were ten thousand others who were as reliable as a cracked crutch, threatening to split and dash the relationship at any moment.

Godly leadership should arise from the relationship the covenants afford to those who make them with God. They must be entered with careful consideration because duty and loyalty do not appear of their own accord by nature. If the purposes of a covenant are to be achieved, dedication and sacrificial love must be present. Participation in them must be active and growing through faithful submission to produce what God has formulated them to achieve.

Those who enter a covenant with God must understand that godly leadership is not merely what is expected of others, that is, those serving in public leadership positions. Godly leadership contains qualities everybody—male and female, moms and dads, school teachers and mechanics, ministers and the police—must exhibit. It is needed everywhere all the time, or the community begins to break down. Everyone must see himself as vital to the well-being of all. The most critical area of all is right in the home.

Perhaps all along, in each covenant the problem of mankind's irresponsibility may have been that some do not perceive their responsibility as essential to the covenant's success. Rather than seeking God for the spiritual help to succeed in faithfully glorifying Him, the carnal nature is allowed to focus on the self and its immediate desires rather than on its responsibilities to the whole of God's purpose. Human nature is expert at convincing us that we are unimportant to the "Big Picture" of what God is working out. It is also, therefore, impatient for results for which we may feel some enthusiasm.

It is at this critical juncture that our lack of faith leads to failure. We fail to appreciate the magnificent greatness of God Himself. He did not make a mistake in calling us. We fail to understand that we are needed within His purpose, or He would have extended His invitation to someone else. He is fully aware of what is happening in our lives. He is preparing us for a place in His Family Kingdom, as He knows exactly where He is heading with His purposes. We are not "nothing" to Him. Therefore, it is our responsibility to give of ourselves within His purpose to ensure we are conforming to His will.

Our entering the New Covenant has instituted a unique relationship with Him that not many people on earth possess. The relationship establishes responsibilities we must faithfully perform, which the

Bible calls “works of faith.” We implement these things as significant parts of our lives, showing everyone what we believe. Meeting the terms of this covenant with God is a responsibility no different in principle than meeting the terms of a home mortgage contract—with the sure exception that the covenant with God is considerably more important!

In this area, mankind has its greatest problem in remaining faithful. Unless a person truly has faith in God, it is easy for him to fail to uphold his part of the agreement through sheer neglect driven by his desires to please himself. It remains extremely easy for the carnal nature to break its promises to the loving and merciful but invisible God. An individual must strive to keep Him in mind constantly through seeking Him for His glory, or the carnal nature will blur our vision of Him, leading us to neglect Him.

No Neglect on God’s Part

Last time, we saw that God’s sanctification of people for a specific purpose begins the salvation process. Nothing in His operations allows for any individual’s calling to be random. God is not only faithful, but He is also thoughtfully purposeful. Our calling was specific.

The period between Creation and the Flood lasted around 1,650 years. Though that is indeed a long time for us, it is a short time for God, who was busy preparing for the next step in fulfilling His purpose. We cannot fully appreciate His motivation for making what researchers call the Noachian Covenant unless we are prepared by grasping the significant changes that took place after the end of Genesis 3. Comparing Genesis 1-3 with Genesis 6 helps do this.

As we begin, comparing two verses will refresh our memories. II Peter 3:8-9 provides us with an overview of God’s intention for humanity:

But, beloved, do not forget this one thing, that with the Lord one day is as a thousand years, and a thousand years as one day. The Lord is not slack concerning His promise, as some count slackness, but is longsuffering toward us, not willing that any should perish but that all should come to repentance.

No matter how men may interpret what God is doing, His intent is to save. On the other hand, Genesis 6:5-6 reveals what mankind was doing during this early time in earth’s history:

Then the Lord saw that the wickedness of man was great in the earth, and that every intent of the thoughts of his heart was only evil continually. And the Lord was sorry that He had made man on the earth, and He was grieved in His heart.

Just like its spiritual father, Satan, mankind uses God’s beautiful creation self-centeredly and destroys.

In Genesis 1-3, we see God graciously giving mankind wonderful gifts to enjoy life. He provided them with long lives and brilliant minds to make use of earth’s resources. In Genesis 6, though, we see humanity destroying virtually every good gift in its savage disrespect for Him and what He had made. An ever-increasing population was living nearly without restraint. Perhaps the most astounding detail in this whole mess is what all this did to God: He was grieved in His heart that He had created humanity.

To appreciate the Flood and the covenant that resulted, we need to grasp a major factor that directly led to it. God does not judge impatiently or carelessly; He is merciful and gracious, His actions always motivated by love. Everything He does is in the best interest of His purpose and with the well-being of others at heart. Even considering those two factors, what God did in using an overwhelming Flood to wipe out the entire human population in a matter of a few days is sobering. Undoubtedly, God had good cause.

We have no figures at hand to show how many lives perished, but in 1,600-plus years, combined with their brilliant minds and long lives, not only the population could have been abundant, but the development of the earth's material resources may also have been extensive and advanced. We look forward to having those details revealed.

These considerations indicate that two factors made Him decide to destroy nearly all life and begin all over again: 1) a profound change in the quality of life combined with 2) what was developing in people's minds. God did not have an attitude of defeat or failure. Instead, He primarily considered the result of what was occurring in people's minds. It was a sobering judgment but not nearly as bad as what would have been produced had He allowed events to continue. His judgment provides us a clear understanding of His loving character.

God Looks on the Heart

God's reaction was guided by what He saw regarding mankind's sins. In His experience with humanity at this point, He concluded that sin should not be understood as a mere imperfection in character but as a hostile, infecting, poisonous, and destructive force relentlessly driving people to even greater excesses. Added to this reality is an element that significantly raises the level of seriousness: Sin is not merely murder, lying, coveting, thievery, etc., but a vicious motivation buried deeply in men's hearts that generates evil almost incessantly.

Truly, Jesus made a clear statement to the disciples in Matthew 15:16-20:

So Jesus said, "Are you also still without understanding? Do you not yet understand that whatever enters the mouth goes into the stomach and is eliminated? But those things which proceed out of the mouth come from the heart, and they defile a man. For out of the heart proceed evil thoughts, murders, adulteries, fornications, thefts, false witness, blasphemies. These are the things which defile a man, but to eat with unwashed hands does not defile a man."

Does not Genesis 6:5 say, "Every intent of the thoughts of his heart was only evil continually"? God's statement is not an exaggeration. The heart is a generator of evil by nature. In Ecclesiastes 7:29, Solomon reminds us, "Truly, this only I have found: That God made man upright, but they have sought out many schemes." How far mankind had fallen from the pinnacle of purity and righteousness Adam and Eve contained when created by this same God! How radically that beautiful creation had changed!

Sin, then, is not merely what one sees on the outside. Far more challenging to understand and deal with is the reality that it is an internal matter; sin is generated from within. This is all the more interesting because Jesus later admonishes us not to look on the outward appearance in making judgments (John 7:24). Yet, we must do this because we lack the godly powers to judge as God does.

I Samuel 16:7 says that in His judgments God looks on the heart. From this incident, the wisest of all Beings, God Himself, teaches us a valuable principle of judgment: When the heart becomes so consistently wicked that evil is its natural course of action, nothing can be done to change it.

We can judge the actions of a person and conclude, “He is a liar because he lies.” In other words, we judge so because we literally witness the person lie. God can look into a person’s heart and pronounce with perfect judgment, “He lies because he is a liar.” His discernment is far more penetrating, right to the roots of the practice. He perceives that the person lies because it is part of his nature. He observes that the person is enslaved to the practice. When humans reach that stage of evil, their course is set; they will go into the Lake of Fire. What we see recorded in the story of the Flood is a type of what is coming, only then fire will be His agent and the consequences eternal.

With the Flood, God intervened for all humanity to stop the process so that men did not become totally enslaved by a heart with a permanently set nature. They were on the verge of becoming irreparably depraved. Jesus makes clear in His Olivet Prophecy that the time just before His return will be similar to the times just before the Flood (Matthew 24:37). Also, Jeremiah 30:7 alerts us to be aware, declaring, “Alas! For that day is great, so that none is like it; and it is the time of Jacob’s trouble.” Except for the few who truly have faith, as compared to how many people populate this earth, humanity is headed in that direction, and it appears that nothing will stop it from continuing in that direction.

Grace Enters the Picture

God says in Genesis 6:7-8, “I will destroy man whom I have created from the face of the earth, both man and beast, creeping things and birds of the air, for I am sorry that I have made them. But Noah found grace in the eyes of the Lord.” Here is the first use of the term “grace” in the Old Testament.

Others like Adam and Eve certainly received a measure of grace from God because He could have killed them on the spot for their disloyalty in submitting to Satan, since the wages of sin is death (Romans 6:23). Abel, Seth, Enoch, and others undoubtedly also received grace. These men appear to have been converted (see Hebrews 11), and their sins forgiven.

Notice it says, “Noah found grace.” It is stated this way so we understand that he did not earn it by his conduct; it was given as a gift, which happens to every converted person. This is not all it says regarding Noah. Regarding his conduct, Genesis 6:9 states: “This is the genealogy of Noah. Noah was a just man, perfect in his generations. Noah walked with God.” The word “perfect” does not refer to his ancestry but to his habitual, daily conduct.

The terms “just,” “perfect,” and “walked with God” all signify his conduct among those in his family and community. Noah was a righteous man who could be trusted because people knew he kept the laws of God. “Walking with God” denotes one so close to God in his manner of life that He would keep company with him because he was obedient despite all the corruption surrounding him on every side. That he was perfect (“blameless,” KJV) among his contemporaries suggests he had no major flaws in his character. In addition, II Peter 2:5 calls him “a preacher of righteousness.”

We need to make sure we are correct regarding Noah and grace because we want to be consistent and accurate about receiving grace. Scripture always shows grace as something given by God; it is never earned. Genesis 6:8, then, does not say Noah received grace because his life already reflected all those good attributes, but that he was conducting his life righteously because God had given him

grace. His conduct was proof that he found favor with God. God gave grace, and Noah then began living his life in a godly manner. The favor—grace—empowered him to behave as is recorded here.

An additional result of finding grace was to separate or sanctify him from all others on earth whom God had not sanctified for the purpose the Bible goes on to show. The grace, the favor, the gifts of God, always precede anything produced within His purpose and calling.

We can see this principle in the original creation leading up to Adam and Eve. God's gift, His grace, His favor, of creating the earth with all its powers and beauty to support life preceded the actual creation of Adam and Eve. Then, after their creation, God gifted them with life, a spirit, and intellect. He then gave them more gifts: instruction in how to use His gifts. These elements were available to empower them to live as God intended.

However, they did not use them properly and failed. Noah stood out because he responded correctly to the grace, the gifts, the favor, God gave him, and so God called him righteous. Likewise, we have found favor, grace, and gifts in God's calling of us, so we need to evaluate whether we are responding as Noah did to the love of God shed abroad in our hearts by His Holy Spirit (Romans 5:5).

God's Overwhelming Love for Us

But why us? The answer may be unsatisfying or unfulfilling because, being so broad and unspecific, it does not really answer the question. The answer is because He loves us.

Deuteronomy 7:6-8, a statement made by God to Israel, says something about God's love and grace that appears illogical:

For you are a holy people to the Lord your God; the Lord your God has chosen you to be a people for Himself, a special treasure above all the peoples on the face of the earth. The Lord did not set His love on you nor choose you because you were more in number than any other people, for you were the least of all peoples; but because the Lord loves you, and because He would keep the oath which He swore to your fathers, the Lord has brought you out with a mighty hand, and redeemed you from the house of bondage, from the hand of Pharaoh king of Egypt.

Did we catch what He says? Verse 7 introduces a denial, which can be paraphrased as, "You should not think I gave you this grace because of anything in you, anything you have done, or anything you have been part of." Yet, in verse 8, He says, "But I have given it to you because I love you." Putting these two thoughts together, He essentially says, "I love you because I love you." That seems illogical to us, but it is the logic of grace.

If God acted on our good qualities, it would remove grace entirely from the picture because the gift or gifts would be earned. They would no longer be freely given gifts of His love. We must understand that we are not merely undeserving. Because of our sins, we deserve death for any sin we may commit along the way with Him to salvation, regardless of how slight or unintentional we may think it is. He gifts us because He loves us no matter how He chooses to state His reasons for giving them to us.

Isaiah 66:1-2 may provide us with a possible reason He does it this way:

Thus says the Lord: “Heaven is My throne, and earth is My footstool. Where is the house that you will build Me? And where is the place of My rest? For all these things My hand has made, and all those things exist,” says the Lord. “But on this one will I look: On him who is poor and of a contrite spirit, and who trembles at My word.”

Perhaps humility stands above all character qualities He desires to be created in us. The humble submit to Him in love. Their submission is love expressed in their actions.

Maybe His desire for humility in us is a response to Satan’s pride, which destroyed him and will destroy all who follow him. Ezekiel 28:17 says of Satan, “Your heart was lifted up because of your beauty; you corrupted your wisdom for the sake of your splendor; I cast you to the ground, I laid you before kings that they might gaze at you.”

The arch-rebel does not choose to be humble and submit, but being humble is clearly a choice, as I Peter 5:5-7 admonishes:

Likewise you younger people, submit yourselves to your elders. Yes, all of you be submissive to one another, and be clothed with humility, for God resists the proud, but gives grace to the humble. Therefore humble yourselves under the mighty hand of God, that He may exalt you in due time, casting all your care upon Him, for He cares for you.

Those who are humble will deliberately and willingly submit to His gifts.

What have we learned from the record of Noah’s experiences to this point? We must not just rush by this first mention of grace in the Bible, which God purposely and deliberately inserted here. He also intentionally used the term “found” so we will understand that Noah’s conduct was a fruit of God’s grace, not something inherent that made God call and use him. It was as if Noah was walking a path and came upon a great treasure that changed his entire life from then on. The Creator God put the treasure there for him to find.

What true conclusions can we reach? Grace is a gift of God to enable us to reach our goals within His purposes. Like Adam and Eve and like Noah, we play essential roles in what is going on—but not until after God gives His gifts. Adam and Eve failed. Noah succeeded. We can see from Noah’s record that grace leads to righteous conduct, walking with God, blamelessness, and making the right witness. In addition, grace provides salvation from the destruction to come. Without grace, there is no new creation.

The Noahic Covenant Proposed

Genesis 6:13, 18-22 contains instruction from God to Noah and his response:

And God said to Noah, “The end of all flesh has come before Me, for the earth is filled with violence through them; and behold, I will destroy them with the earth. . . . But I will establish My covenant with you; and you shall go into the ark—you, your sons, your wife, and your sons’ wives with you. And of every living thing of all flesh you shall bring two of every sort into the ark, to keep them alive with you; they shall be male and female. Of the birds after their kind, of animals after their kind, and of every creeping thing of the earth after its kind, two of every kind will come to you to keep them alive. And you shall take for yourself of all food that is eaten, and you shall gather it to

yourself; and it shall be food for you and for them.” This Noah did; according to all that God commanded him, so he did.

It is not until Genesis 8:18 that the challenging ordeal of the Flood itself is over, the ark comes to rest, and the eight survivors disembark. It is tempting to expound on this material because it is so intriguing. The evidence regarding sightings of remnants of the ark is impressive as well as controversial. Records of sightings of these remnants date from before the time of Christ and have been preserved to our time. Even Josephus testifies of it in his *Antiquities of the Jews*, which he penned for Romans to read.

However, consider Hebrews 11:6-7 in this light:

But without faith it is impossible to please Him, for he who comes to God must believe that He is, and that He is a rewarder of those who diligently seek Him. By faith Noah, being divinely warned of things not yet seen, moved with godly fear, prepared an ark for the saving of his household, by which he condemned the world and became heir of the righteousness which is according to faith.

Men have twisted Egyptian history to make it appear that Israel could not have had contact with Egypt at the time the Bible records. Trusting in the truth of God’s Word, we can conclude that God has not permitted the evidence to be confirmed because His is a work of faith, which we must exercise in our lives. The same could be said for “proof” of Noah’s ark. We must answer this question to our satisfaction: Is our trust in Him and His Word or in a scrap of ancient wood some man says comes from Noah’s ark?

Genesis 6:18 is notable partly because it contains the first use of the term “covenant” in Scripture, falling under the unwritten “Law of First Mention.” In the remainder of the Bible, it appears 252 more times. It is a significant term because of what “covenant” means to our relationship with God.

Theologians attach many definitions to it, such as the simple “a promise.” Theologian Charles Hodge defines it as “a promise suspended upon a condition, and [to which God] attached to disobedience a certain penalty.” Another termed it as “a bond sovereignly administered.” Modern legal terminology is adequate: “A covenant is a legal document establishing the terms of a relationship between parties involved together in the accomplishment of a purpose.”

Despite Genesis 6:18 being the first time “covenant” is used, it is not the first time the sense of a covenant appears in the Bible—and definitely not the last. It is but one of many to come as God’s purpose unfolds. What does a covenant accomplish that assists both God’s purpose and mankind’s understanding of the life the Creator has given him? Humans need a clear understanding of this question if they are to have a good relationship with God. Deuteronomy 29:29 gives the answer: “The secret things belong to the Lord our God, but those things which are revealed belong to us and to our children forever, that we may do all the words of this law.”

Covenants, sometimes specifically and sometimes broadly, spell out each party’s responsibilities within a relationship the parties have formed to accomplish a purpose. Biblically, a covenant may not be formally proposed and executed by God with man, as the sense of a covenant within a given context may be apparent to a thoughtful reader. Thus, what researchers call the Edenic Covenant is

indeed a covenant even though it is not formally proposed, as the terms of the relationship between the Creator and those He created in Genesis 1 are easily discerned. Adam and Eve were to obey the Creator's rules as He personally revealed them and to do so without sin.

In like manner, some researchers perceive a second covenant, which they call the Adamic Covenant. Again, it is not formally proposed by God to Adam and Eve because their sins and the judgments God imposed so obviously altered life and the relationship between God and humanity. A formal declaration of a new covenant was not necessary. It appears after our first parents' sins and God's judgments, since those factors so seriously and obviously altered the relationships among all concerned.

Mark this truth well: The sins and their judgments altered not only the lives of Adam and Eve but also all who came after. Thus, their effects touch us too because those sins and God's judgments dramatically changed the world we live in (see Romans 8 for an expansion on this thought). Each covenant reveals God's purpose more explicitly to meet the demands of His purposes, but overall, as the "Big Picture" unfolds through the course of the Bible, it also reveals that His central purpose has never changed from the beginning. God declares in Malachi 3:6, "I am the Lord, I do not change; therefore you are not consumed, O sons of Jacob."

The "Big Picture" reveals that God's purpose from the beginning has been to make man in His image and likeness. God did not cause us to sin; we have deliberately chosen to sin. We must live by faith and keep His commandments. We are saved by grace through faith, which is a gift of God. We must repent of sin and accept Jesus Christ, the Lamb slain from before the foundation of the earth, as our personal Savior. We must grow to love God with all our soul, mind, and might, and love our neighbor as ourselves.

The motivation for our submission to God has always been the wonderful mixture of trust in His Word—faith—combined with deep, personal love for Him for what He is in His character. New elements are introduced with each covenant, as God's purpose is progressively developed for mankind's clearer understanding. Each distinguishing mark of His purpose unfolds as humanity needs to understand its place in what is happening within God's creative process.

A Few Points to Consider

The Noahic Covenant, like the Edenic Covenant, is also a universal covenant. Though it is made with Noah, its purpose is to redefine the relationship between God and all mankind in the world that arises after the Flood. Only eight people remained. At least partly, this covenant was given so that Noah and ultimately all humanity could come to know that the Flood did not abolish the covenant following Adam's and Eve's sins and the application of God's judgments. Though the Flood was devastating, mankind is still bound to obey what was previously ordained. The Noahic covenant announces that the Flood did not change God's purpose. It did not wipe away man's original responsibilities, just the lawbreakers.

» In Genesis 9:1, God reaffirms the responsibility to repopulate the earth.

» Genesis 9:2 confirms that humanity retains dominion over animal life as in the Edenic Covenant but adds a new twist: Now animals will fear man from this time forward.

» Genesis 9:3-4 provides the first clear indication that people are permitted to eat the flesh of animals, but at the same time, they are admonished not to eat the flesh with the blood still in it. This stipulation is out of respect for the animal, as its life has been sacrificed for our benefit.

» Genesis 9:5-6 affirms the sacredness of human life with a penalty added when life is taken through murder or an animal attack. Some scholars contend that it is unthinkable to believe that there was not some form of human government before the Flood, but in any case, this provision officially and formally establishes or reestablishes it.

Genesis 9:9-10 presents us with a first regarding covenants: The covenant is directly confirmed to Noah, and not just to him but also to all his descendants and even to every living creature, both domestic and wild, beginning with those who shared the ark with Noah and left it as he did.

Genesis 9:11-17 declares God's solemn promise never to destroy all life through a flood. His guarantee—the rainbow—is something every sighted person can see, a constant reminder to all of mankind that such an overwhelming flood will never happen again. In its own way, the rainbow is also a confirmation to us that all of His covenants and all of His laws continue in force as our guides and the revelation of His way of life. We are still to use them as needed for abundant life.