

# Genesis 9:1-29 – "Embrace Mercy's Covenant"

## Text: Genesis 9:1-29 (CSB)

**1** God blessed Noah and his sons and said to them, "Be fruitful and multiply and fill the earth. **2** The fear and terror of you will be in every living creature on the earth, every bird of the sky, every creature that crawls on the ground, and all the fish of the sea. They are placed under your authority. **3** Every creature that lives and moves will be food for you; as I gave the green plants, I have given you everything. **4** However, you must not eat meat with its lifeblood in it. **5** And I will require a penalty for your lifeblood; I will require it from any animal and from any human; if someone murders a fellow human, I will require that person's life.

**6** Whoever sheds human blood, by humans his blood will be shed, for God made humans in his image.

**7** But you, be fruitful and multiply; spread out over the earth and multiply on it."

**8** Then God said to Noah and his sons with him, **9** "Understand that I am establishing my covenant with you and your descendants after you, **10** and with every living creature that is with you—birds, livestock, and all wildlife of the earth that are with you—all the animals of the earth that came out of the ark. **11** I establish my covenant with you that never again will every creature be wiped out by floodwaters; there will never again 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 future generations: **13** I have placed my bow in the clouds, and it will be a sign of the covenant between me and the earth. **14** Whenever I form clouds over the earth and the bow appears in the clouds, **15** I will remember my covenant between me and you and all the living creatures: water will never again become a flood to destroy every creature. **16** The bow will be in the clouds, and I will look at it and remember the permanent covenant between God and all the living creatures on earth." **17** God said to Noah, "This is the sign of the covenant that I have established between me and every creature on earth."

**18** Noah's sons who came out of the ark were Shem, Ham, and Japheth. Ham was the father of Canaan. **19** These three were Noah's sons, and from them the whole earth was populated.

**20** Noah, as a man of the soil, began by planting a vineyard. **21** He drank some of the wine, became drunk, and uncovered himself inside his tent. **22** Ham, the father of Canaan, saw his father naked and told his two brothers outside. **23** Then Shem and Japheth took a cloak and placed it over both their shoulders, and walking backward, they covered their father's nakedness. Their faces were turned away, and they did not see their father naked. **24** When Noah awoke from his drinking and learned what his youngest son had done to him, **25** he said: Canaan is cursed. He will be the lowest of slaves to his brothers. **26** He also said: Blessed be the LORD, the God of Shem; Let Canaan be Shem's slave. **27** Let God extend Japheth; let Japheth dwell in the tents of Shem; let Canaan be Japheth's slave.

**28** Now Noah lived 350 years after the flood. **29** So Noah's life lasted 950 years; then he died.

## Key Background:

- **Multiple Covenant Changes:** Genesis 9 establishes several fundamental changes to how God governs creation post-flood. This isn't just one covenant but a comprehensive restructuring of human authority, the animal kingdom, diet, justice, and God's promises. These changes establish the framework for all human civilization until Christ's return—covering how we relate to animals, food, government, capital punishment, and God's faithfulness.
- **Echoes of Creation:** God's blessing and command to Noah (vv. 1, 7) deliberately echoes Genesis 1:28—"Be fruitful and multiply and fill the earth." This signals a new beginning, a fresh start for humanity. Noah becomes a second Adam, with his sons repopulating the earth just as Adam's descendants did originally.
- **Changed Relationship with Animals:** Before the flood, humanity and animals coexisted peacefully in God's "very good" creation (Genesis 1:31). Now God says "the fear and terror of you will be in every living creature" (v. 2). This represents a fundamental shift in the created order. Animals now instinctively fear humans, breaking the harmonious relationship established in Eden. This change reflects the broader effects of sin, the judgment of the flood, and establishes human authority over a now-fearful animal kingdom. The relationship moves from partnership in Eden to dominion through fear.
- **Permission to Eat Meat—A Dietary Covenant Change:** For the first time, God explicitly permits humans to eat meat (v. 3). Previously, both humans and animals were given only plants for food (Genesis 1:29-30). This

fundamental change in diet likely altered the entire food chain. If animals were originally herbivorous (as Genesis 1:30 suggests—"every green plant for food"), this dietary shift may have introduced predation into the animal kingdom as well. The permission to eat meat comes with the restriction against eating blood, establishing the principle that life belongs to God. This dietary covenant transforms both human diet and potentially the nature of the animal kingdom itself.

- **Prohibition Against Eating Blood:** God forbids eating "meat with its lifeblood in it" (v. 4). This principle—that blood represents life and belongs to God—becomes foundational in Scripture (Leviticus 17:11, Deuteronomy 12:23). It points forward to Christ's blood as the ultimate life given for atonement. Proper treatment of blood shows respect for life as God's gift.
- **Sanctity of Human Life:** Verses 5-6 establish the sanctity of human life and the basis for capital punishment. Murder demands the ultimate penalty because humans are made in God's image—to kill a human is to assault God's image-bearer. This isn't personal vengeance but divinely-mandated justice administered by human authorities, establishing governmental authority to punish evil.
- **Capital Punishment and the Establishment of Human Government:** "Whoever sheds human blood, by humans his blood will be shed" (v. 6). This is the foundational establishment of human governmental authority—the right and responsibility to execute justice, including capital punishment for murder. Before this, God alone executed judgment (the flood, the mark on Cain). Now God delegates judicial authority to humans to restrain evil and maintain order. This establishes the institution of government itself—human authority under God to punish evildoers. Romans 13:1-4 confirms that government "does not bear the sword in vain" and is "God's servant, an avenger that brings wrath on the one who does wrong." Every government's authority to administer justice traces back to Genesis 9:6. This is a covenant of governmental authority that predates Moses and applies to all nations throughout all time.
- **The Basis: Image of God:** The reason murder merits death is profound: "for God made humans in his image" (v. 6). Despite the Fall, despite sin's corruption, humans still bear God's image (Genesis 5:3, James 3:9). Every human life has inherent, sacred worth because we reflect our Creator. This forbids not just murder but devaluing any person made in God's image.
- **The Rainbow Covenant—God's Promise to All Creation:** God gives the rainbow as the visible sign of His covenant promise never to destroy all life by flood again (vv. 12-17). This covenant is unique: it's unconditional (requires nothing from humanity), universal (covers all living creatures), everlasting (for all generations), and visible (the rainbow serves as a perpetual reminder). The rainbow appears when sunlight refracts through water droplets—a beautiful reminder emerging from the very elements (water and sky) that brought judgment. It transforms instruments of destruction into symbols of mercy. This covenant establishes God's commitment to sustain creation and provides the stable environment necessary for His redemptive plan to unfold through history.
- **"I Will Remember":** Three times God says He will "remember" His covenant when He sees the rainbow (vv. 15-16). This anthropomorphic language (God speaking in human terms) doesn't mean God forgets without the reminder but emphasizes His commitment. The rainbow is for our benefit—a visible reassurance of God's faithful promise every time storm clouds gather.
- **A Permanent Covenant:** The covenant is described as "permanent" and for "all future generations" (vv. 12, 16). Unlike the Mosaic Covenant which was conditional and temporary (fulfilled and superseded in Christ), the Noahic Covenant endures as long as earth exists. As long as earth remains, God promises never to destroy all life by flood again. This demonstrates God's patience and His commitment to work redemptively within history. The rainbow covenant guarantees the stability necessary for human civilization, the growth of nations, and ultimately for the coming of the Messiah. Every rainbow is God renewing His promise to every generation.
- **Noah's Vineyard:** After the flood, Noah plants a vineyard and becomes drunk (vv. 20-21). This incident is deeply troubling—the righteous man who walked with God falls into drunkenness and shameful exposure. It demonstrates that even the godliest people remain sinners capable of failure. No human hero is perfect; only Christ is the flawless image-bearer.
- **Ham's Sin:** Ham "saw his father naked and told his two brothers outside" (v. 22). The Hebrew may suggest more than merely seeing—possibly violation or mockery. Ham's response shows disrespect and dishonor rather than covering his father's shame. His telling others compounds the offense, showing contempt rather than compassion for his father's dignity.

- **Shem and Japheth's Honor:** In contrast, Shem and Japheth "took a cloak... walking backward, they covered their father's nakedness. Their faces were turned away" (v. 23). They honored their father by protecting his dignity without participating in his shame. This demonstrates the biblical principle of honoring parents (Exodus 20:12) and covering, rather than exposing, the sins of others (1 Peter 4:8).
- **The Curse on Canaan:** Noah's curse falls not on Ham directly but on his son Canaan: "Canaan is cursed. He will be the lowest of slaves to his brothers" (v. 25). This prophetic curse anticipates the Canaanites' future wickedness and Israel's conquest of Canaan (Deuteronomy 7:1-2). It's not racial (all humans are descendants of Noah) but moral and spiritual—a pronouncement on the corruption that would characterize Canaan's descendants.
- **Blessing on Shem:** Noah blesses "the LORD, the God of Shem" (v. 26), indicating that the line of blessing and the promised Messiah would come through Shem's descendants—the Semitic peoples, including Abraham, Israel, and ultimately Jesus Christ. This establishes Shem's line as the channel of redemption.
- **Japheth Extended:** The blessing on Japheth—"Let God extend Japheth" (v. 27)—is fulfilled as Japheth's descendants (Indo-Europeans) spread widely across the earth. The phrase "dwell in the tents of Shem" may refer to Gentiles being grafted into the covenant blessings originally given to Shem's line, fulfilled when Gentiles receive the gospel (Romans 11:17-24).

## Questions from the Story:

- What blessing and command does God give Noah and his sons (v. 1)? How does this echo Genesis 1:28?
- What will characterize the relationship between humans and animals going forward (v. 2)? How is this different from before the flood and from God's original "very good" creation in Genesis 1?
- What authority does God place animals under (v. 2)? What does this shift from peaceful coexistence to "fear and terror" reveal about sin's effects?
- What new permission does God grant to humanity (v. 3)? What dietary change is introduced?
- How might this permission to eat meat have changed not just human diet but the entire animal kingdom and food chain?
- What restriction does God place on eating meat (v. 4)? Why is blood treated differently?
- For what does God require a penalty (v. 5)? From whom will He require it?
- What is the penalty for shedding human blood (v. 6)? Who administers this justice—God directly or humans?
- What is the reason given for capital punishment (v. 6)? What does this teach about human worth?
- How does verse 6 establish human governmental authority? What power is God delegating to human institutions?
- What command is repeated in verse 7? Why might this be emphasized again?
- With whom does God establish His covenant (vv. 9-10)? How extensive is this covenant—just humans or broader?
- What does God promise will never happen again (v. 11)? What specific destruction is ruled out?
- What sign does God give for this covenant (vv. 12-13)? Where is this sign placed and why is it visible to all?
- What will happen when God sees the bow in the clouds (vv. 14-16)? What does God say He will remember?
- How long will this covenant last (v. 12)? What makes it "permanent"?
- Who are Noah's three sons (v. 18)? What is significant about Ham's identification?
- What does verse 19 say about these three sons? How does this affect all of humanity?
- What does Noah plant (v. 20)? What happens when he drinks the wine (v. 21)?
- What does Ham do when he sees his father's condition (v. 22)? What does this reveal about his character?
- How do Shem and Japheth respond (v. 23)? What does their action demonstrate?
- What does Noah do when he learns what happened (v. 24)? Who does he curse (v. 25)?
- What specific curse does Noah pronounce on Canaan (v. 25)? What will be his relationship to his brothers?
- Who does Noah bless in verses 26-27? What does he say about the relationship between these sons?
- How long does Noah live after the flood (v. 28)? What is his total lifespan (v. 29)?
- How does God's command to "be fruitful and multiply" after the flood signal a new beginning with restructured authority and order?
- What does the changed relationship between humans and animals (fear and terror) teach us about how sin's effects ripple through all creation?

- How does the permission to eat meat represent a fundamental shift in the created order? What might this reveal about changes in the animal kingdom itself?
- Why is the prohibition against eating blood significant? How does this point forward to Christ's blood and the principle that life belongs to God?
- What does Genesis 9:6 teach about the sanctity of human life, the basis for capital punishment, and the establishment of human government?
- How does the delegation of governmental authority to execute justice represent a new covenant structure for restraining evil?
- How does the fact that humans still bear God's image after the Fall (v. 6) affect how we should treat all people?
- Why is the Noahic Covenant called "unconditional" and "universal"? Who benefits from this covenant?
- How does the rainbow serve as a visible reminder of God's faithfulness and mercy to all creation?
- What does God's promise to "remember" His covenant teach us about His character and commitment?
- How do all these covenant changes—animal fear, meat eating, government authority, and the rainbow promise—work together to establish order in the post-flood world?
- In what ways does Genesis 9 establish the foundational structure for all human civilization and government until Christ's return?
- Why is Noah's drunkenness included in Scripture? What does this teach about even the godliest people?
- What is the difference between Ham's response and Shem and Japheth's response to their father's sin?
- How does the principle of "covering" rather than exposing the sins of others (v. 23) apply to how we treat fellow believers?
- Why does Noah curse Canaan rather than Ham directly? How is this curse prophetic?
- How does the blessing on Shem point forward to the line of the Messiah?
- In what ways does the Noahic Covenant demonstrate God's patience and commitment to work redemptively despite human sin?