

Genesis 9:12

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[0 : 00] Genesis chapter 9, verses 12 and 13. And God said, This is the sign of the covenant I am making between me and you, and every living creature with you, a covenant for all generations to come.

I have set my window in the clouds, and this will be the sign of the covenant between me and earth. Now I hope you will have noticed that in our Psalms this evening, and indeed in part in our reading too, there has been a common element.

And that element is the idea of the covenant. This is something that is very commonly mentioned in the scriptures. His covenant he remembered has that it may ever stand to thousand generations the word he did command.

Now Psalm speaks of that covenant being renewed for future generations. Similarly in Psalm 80, I was my chosen one, have made a covenant graciously.

And to my servant, whom I loved, to David's sworn have I. That's an idea that runs throughout the scriptures.

[1 : 28] And it's an idea that's very common in our outlook. We speak, for example, of covenant children. And we speak of covenant theology. And that's an idea that has molded and sheeted the theology of the church to which we belong.

But what does the covenant mean? What is the idea that we've got to have in mind when we speak of that? Do we appreciate and understand the ideas contained in the covenant?

And it's something practically useful for us in our living lives. How much does the covenant mean for us? How acquainted are we with it?

And that is he has a special day for this particular occasion which we're gathered. A preparatory service for the Lord's Supper.

Because the words of institution of the Lord's Supper, as you know very well, can give you a reference to the covenant. This covenant is the new covenant in my blood.

[2 : 42] That covenant one that we teach in the Lord's Supper speaks to us of covenant blessings. And to the way in which these covenant blessings were ratified by the shedding of blood.

And if we are going to prepare properly for the Lord's Supper, if we're going to understand what it means, and if we're going to examine ourselves adequately, there's no better preparation than a proper examination and understanding of the basic ideas of what a covenant is.

And that's what I'd like to start to do this evening. The first time that the covenant is mentioned in the scriptures is in the passages that were read in Genesis 8 and 9.

And that's the place that we're going to start, in looking at what is involved in a covenant. I think you can see here, in the terms of this covenant, that by a covenant, God expresses the way in which he's going to deal with people.

The covenant regulates the relationship between God and his creatures, or between God and his people.

[4 : 12] It describes the way the arrangement that he's made to deal with us. You can see this freely in this passage that is before us.

By establishing a covenant, he's letting the people know what treatment they can expect to receive from him in the future. And the terms of the covenant, are a sovereign disposition, or laying down, of the arrangement, which regulates his dealings with them.

I establish my covenant with you, he says here in verse 11. Never again will all life be cut off by the waters of a flood. Never again will there be a flood to destroy the earth.

God speaks to mankind. He speaks to Noah and his family. He speaks to the animals he has made. And he brings to them this assurance in regard to the way that he's going to treat them and deal

with them in the future.

And the terms of the covenant express the relationship that he's going to have with them from that point on. Now, the first main point that I'd like to make about the covenant is this.

[5 : 38] The covenant rests on God's sovereign grace. The covenant rests on God's sovereign grace.

In the covenant, God speaks. In the covenant, God lays their terms. In the covenant, God sovereignly displays his purpose and his intention for the future.

It comes from him. It comes from him sovereignly. And it comes from him graciously. We can see this idea, for example, in the terms in which it comes.

It comes in terms of a promise. And the fact that it comes in terms of a promise shows that covenant rests on God's sovereign grace.

Here he is, speaking to them, words of mercy and assurance, and seeing that his anger is to be restrained. And that that judgment that they have known on the world is not going to come upon them again in the future in that form.

[6 : 56] And there is the form in which this covenant is expressed in the form of a promise. And right in the heart of all the covenants of the scriptures, there is this idea of the sovereign and gracious promise of God.

Now, I wonder if that's the way in which you look at your relationship with God. Do you recognize that if you are going to be able to know God and deal with God, the only basis upon which you can come to Him is upon the basis of the gracious promises of His Word.

Covenant implies promise. Now, that's, you see, something that we need to emphasize just for this reason. That generally speaking, when we think of a covenant, we think of some sort of mutual agreement between two people, or maybe more people, between different parties.

We may think, for example, of a marriage ceremony as a sort of covenant whereby each accept their obligations and whereby each commit themselves to one another on the basis of mutual obligation.

And there, covenant is the idea that is commonly held about when a covenant means, it's two people, more or less as two goals, entering into an agreement, laying down their mutual obligations, and committing themselves to the fulfillment of that.

[8 : 50] It's a sort of bad, and it is struck. It's a sort of mutually acceptable arrangement of this need. And it's because that is the outlook that many people have about what the covenant is, that we've got to see very plainly within the scriptures, that idea is not present when we speak about God's covenant with us, or God's covenant with his people.

The scriptural idea essentially is this, that it is God coming to man, not entering into some bargain or contact with him, not coming to a mutually acceptable arrangement, but God coming in his grace to man, and speaking to man of the solemn and merciful purpose he has, and laying forth this grace in terms of promise that lies at the very heart of the gospel covenant.

And that's the idea that has to be in our minds when we think of our covenant relationship with God. It is the Pharisee that sees himself as an equal part with God, and that thinks that he can enter into some barrier with God.

It's the person that says, I can offer something to God, that thinks of the covenant as a mutual pact made between man and God.

But the scripture speaks very plainly that man cannot approach God on that basis at all. There's no way that we can bring our righteousness and say, accept me because of that.

[10 : 41] There's no way in which we can look at our lives and assess ourselves and say, I can offer something to God that will compel to be merciful and then gives me a right to expect him to bless me.

That idea is completely absent from the scriptural way of coming to God. It all depends on him. It all comes from his initiative.

It comes from his side, from his side entirely, and it comes to us in the form of a promise which we in our need, we hold off and grasp it ours.

It comes to us when we become brokenhearted and humble and learn to keep from God when we cannot find for ourselves.

That's the basic approach that we've got to have to God, and that's the essential idea that lies behind the covenant. Are you right with God?

[11 : 46] Are you in a good relationship with God? That sort of question leads us to ask another, are you basing your hope on the right relationship upon God's merciful promise or upon your own righteousness?

If you're basing your hope upon your own righteousness, you're failing, but to lay hold upon the promise is to know the blessings of the covenant. So the first thing that makes us see that covenant rises from God's sovereign peace is the fact that this is expressed in terms of promise.

The second thing that makes us see that is the circumstances in which this was given. the background to the story, of course, is one of judgment.

The flood was an act of God's wrath and condemnation, an act of judgment, of justice, the result of curse.

And it's against that background that we've got to see this promise never again will I do such a thing. The covenant is the restraining and the holding back, this covenant is the restraining and holding back of the curse of God upon human sin.

[13 : 27] It seems to me there's two ways in which we can look at the flood as an expression of God's curse and condemnation. God very plainly says that because of the wickedness of man, because his heart is evil, and his inclination is towards evil from his earliest days, for that reason, he's going to wipe out mankind.

It is a clearly expressed act of righteous condemnation, an act of judgment and of justice, when God brings up the people the due reward of their deeds, and makes them feel the sharpness of his anger, and the bitterness of righteous condemnation.

But besides that, the way in which this punishment came to them, was also the result of curse.

The flood was a terrible catastrophe, a tremendous natural disaster, and that came about because of the curse that God had placed upon the world, upon the ground, as a result of the sin of man. when man sinned, as we really begin to see disorder enter into the world. It didn't only enter into the heart of man, it entered into his natural environment too.

[15 : 14] God placed disorder in the world as a result of man's sin. He subjected the world to frustration because he pronounced a curse from the ground.

And there's a result of that nature became increasingly disorderly and it became liable to disaster as the physical body of man was affected by the sin that had been brought into the world.

And the disorder that occurred in action affected his body in the form of pain and suffering. So similarly was his whole physical environment affected by that disorder.

And that came to a tremendous climax in the flood. It wasn't simply that there was very heavy rainfall. The fountains of the great deep were broken up.

The ocean depths were moved. There was a convulsion in the physical world. And this was so severe that literally the floods swept over the whole of the earth.

[16 : 38] It wasn't a specially heavy storm. It was something possibly we might need to be under full understanding. A tremendous natural disaster.

The product of the disorder that had been placed in the natural world because of man's sin. And that's the background to this covenant dealing with mankind.

Never again will that sort of thing happen. Never again will I punish man's sin. It's not because he's changed.

God reiterates that the thought of man's heart is still the evil continually. But God here intimates his mercy. Although man hasn't changed and although God's judgment hasn't changed, God in his mercy is interposing and he is not going to express his justice.

He is holding back his wrath. He is giving back the sentence of condemnation and he is preserving man's life although he deserves to die.

[17 : 59] That's the background to this covenant promise that is given. And not only is that so, but we see here in what God is saying, a deliberate holding back of the forces of disorder that will have worked in the world.

God says, from this time on, as long as the earth endures, seek time and harvest, cold and heat, summer and winter, day and night, will never cease.

Disorder isn't going to reign. The natural chaos that results from the cursed place that the world is being held back to the sixteenth of least.

That will be a regular movement of the earth around its axis to give us day and night, and a regular movement of the earth around the sun to give summer and winter and to give the seasons.

God is putting order in the world and he is restraining and holding back the forces of decay and corruption and disorder that came from the world as a consequence of man's sin.

[19 : 20] And all that happened in the flood is now being held back. Both the punishment of God that came as an act of justice and sinners and the disorder in the physical world that came to his expression in the flood that is being held back as well.

God is saying I am going to punish you and go to restrain and keep back my punishment from you and I am going to place a measure of order in the world so that such a natural disaster as this will not happen again to the end of the world.

And that's what makes the same covenant rests upon God's sovereign grace. The essence of the covenant here is a covenant of common grace to all mankind.

The punishment that is due to you and me for our sin is not going to be affected. The sort of justice that deserves to fall for each one of us is not going to come upon us.

God is holding back that act of justice that would be so fitting that it should come upon us. And he is dealing with each and all of us in grace giving us life and a mission of prosperity and a favoring of all the world that allows us to enjoy God's material blessings.

[20 : 51] That's the nature of the covenant promise in this context. And that's typical of God's covenant dealings. Covenant rests on God's sovereign grace.

God's God's mercy. God's mercy. God's mercy. Why are we alive today? There's only one reason that accounts for our being alive at all.

God's mercy. It's in his mercy that we are not consumed. Are we any different from these folks at the time of the flood? Are we of a better nature than they?

The answer of the Bible is that that is no. We will all burn with sin. Our will have to push seat by the front of the evil. The environment and the healing naturally tends to the server.

So why are we allowed to live? And why does the world go on with a measure of order within it?

The mess of God. The gracious dealings with God.

[22 : 00] Holding back the sword of vengeance and keeping it free of the forces of the server. The because of the covenant that he made with Noah. That's why we're alive today.

And I wonder if this enters into your outlook. And if you appreciate this aspect, even the covenant of Noah, can you say honestly and sincerely, is this the characteristic attitude of your life?

That you say, it's in his mercy, that I am not consumed. I deserve to die.

The sword of dirt would not have fallen in me. I fought out to engulf me in my world and sweep me away into hell. But it's held back by grace.

It's held back by covenant mercy, by this covenant of grace given in the days of Noah, to all mankind and to the animals too, and to their successors.

[23 : 06] Do we take our place before God, a sinful, hell reserving people, lost and hopeless, not even deserving of life, but only receiving life and many blessings by the sovereign grace of God expressed in God.

So there still reasons, why I say, coming rests on God's sovereign grace, because it comes to us in terms of a promise, and because it comes to us in circumstances which speak of judgment and I would like to add a third reason here, and I would like to say that we consider the covenant of grace of God's sovereign grace, because of the fulfillment through which this covenant plouts.

Now, it seems to me that this covenant is plainly said to be one with the whole of the human family, including also, and also, the animal wild.

And yet, this common grace expressed here, surely points forward to the terms of that special covenant that were given to God's people.

here, we see the restraint of curse, and the holding back of judgment. And that brings to us a picture of a merciful and gracious God, and it opens up before our eyes, a God that belongs in blessing, and that wants to treat people in grace.

[25 : 02] And this picture that is given to us, this area of the scriptures, and in the area of the ministry, this picture is amplified and developed in the course of the unfolding revelation of scripture, and it comes to its full expression in the new covenant.

And there, these same things are at work, only to a fuller and richer degree. Here, there is the restraining of judgment.

In Christ, there is the removing of judgment. Here, there is the holding back of the curse. In Christ, there are, for those to trust in them, the complete removal of that curse.

The message of is shown here to all, is shown in the new covenant particularly to his people. And there, the curse, that God falls back according to the covenant with Noah, that curse is pronounced upon Christ.

And that judgment that he restrains according to this covenant, comes upon Christ, in accordance with the chariots of the new covenant.

[26 : 31] And there, he who knew no sin, became sin for us. And he died under curse, weighed down with the sin of others, with the sin of his people, representing them, standing in for them, making themselves responsible for what they are done.

And so, he dies on a cursed death on the cross, desolated by not feeling the presence of God at all, abandoned, because seated as a sinner.

And this is what is pointed forward by the passage that we are considering here. As the curse is restrained in the covenant to Noah, the curse is removed in the covenant that Jesus was ratified there at Calvary.

As judgment is held back, so judgment is removed for those with whom Christ died. The grace and mercy characteristic of this covenant, find its full fruition in a fuller way so that those who are in curse, for them there is no condemnation.

Instead of the terrible words, you are cursed, away, away from me, into outer darkness, into the lake of fire. Instead of love, there is the reception.

[28 : 11] Come, you who are blessed by my God, receive inheritance prepared for you from before the foundation of the world. That's where the new covenant accomplishes, and that's what this covenant we might see prefigures, and how it's forward to.

It's typical covenant that will display the sovereign grace of a merciful God. God. And when we think in terms of the new covenant, and when we think of taking that cup that symbolizes the blood that brought for us the benefits of the new covenant, then let's ask ourselves this.

Has the curse been kneeled in his face, or is the curse to be removed? Has the judgment simply been held back, or the we are here, that there's no combination of any of those that are in Christ of Jesus?

I'm very, very sad when I see folks trusting him to simply, in the covenant that was made with Noah. Folks that say, and say from the heart, it's a mercy of God that we're here, and day by day, they take with a grateful heart the material blessings that God provides to the seed time of the harvest, of the coal, the heat, and so on, that he's given to us.

And yet they forget the greater blessings that come from that greater covenant, of which this only is a sort of pale shadow. As God holds back the curse, and so we're alive, so he removes it for those that trust in Christ.

[30 : 05] And there are many, many people that are conscious of God peeing for them, and guiding them, and directing them day to day, and supplying for their needs, and entrusting them for that.

But they've no certainty that the curse has been finally removed. The only moment it's restrained, but they haven't entered into the deeper knowledge, and the deeper experience, of knowing it in Christ.

there's no condemnation, there's no curse, because curse and condemnation came upon Christ, our great covenant laid, unrepresentative.

If you are going to keep the trouble of the covenant, just be in awareness that curse and condemnation are gone, in virtue of the blood of our Lord and Savior.

that's the we, to be right with God. Not trusting in this covenant with Noah, but in the greater one, of which this is going to shine.

[31 : 12] So the last main thing that I want to see this evening about covenant, it is something which rests upon God's sovereign grace, because it's given a promise, it's given the form of a promise, it's given in the circumstances of judgment, and it is a fulfilled order that points forward to the greater fulfillment of God's love in the covenant of Christ.

Now I want to say something further about the covenant. Covenant is accompanied by sign. It is not a promise that is simply given, it is a promise to be backed up as accompanied by sign, an outward sign that russifies it.

There are many promises given in the scriptures, but these are not strictly speaking perhaps covenant promises, because there is no sign attached to them.

Where there is covenant given to us or to God's people in the world, there there is an external covenant sign, a company in the covenant. Covenant is the promise confirmed by sign. And you see that in this passage. We have it quite distinctly here in verse 13. I have set my way over the clouds, and it will be the sign of the covenant between me and the earth.

[32 : 49] I'll have to be very brief about this. Some folks think that this is the first time that the rainbow has ever appeared in the history of man. And the way that they look at the scriptures is in this way.

What happened on the second day of creation? And the answer is that there was a firmament or open expanse that separated the waters that were below it from the waters that were above it. And I think what we have got to reflect on there is this idea that the earth was covered over completely with water.

And then there was this firmament, this expanse of atmosphere. And then there was another belt of water presumably in vaporized form that was so substantial and complete as the firmament was said to separate the water that was below from the water that was above it.

And this is the model that some folks have of the world as it was originally. Covered over in a thick layer of water paper.

[34 : 09] Moreover, they allege, they say, that this dried up and watered the curve. the Bible says that. And some folks can think from that, that it never rained at that period of man's history.

And that it was through this mist that went up and covered the earth that washed your chain. And therefore, they go on to suggest that the flood was the first time that rain actually fell.

Perhaps for that reason, the people were taken by surprise and didn't believe Noah when he spoke about it because they never experienced it. That shows up Noah's great faith if that were so.

But that needs to be fit into this picture here. That for the first time, the rain won't see. But why can't we see now for the first time or not?

For the first time, it receives a special significance. it's connected with the covenant. And it is a sign and a confirmation of covenant promise.

[35 : 22] Now, could you look at the rainbow, you remember the covenant, and so you see. You see, there is a sign from God to me that I can trust in him.

And we use that sign to fortify our faith and strengthen us. And we sometimes think that he was given to jog our memory and to make us remember.

But that's not just the way in which it's put in the scriptures. The scriptures put it rather a strange way, which we would naturally do, but because the scriptures do it, we can say it's a good way of putting it.

verse 16. Whenever the rainbow appears in the clouds, I will see it and remember the everlasting covenant between God and our living creatures.

It's done as a reminder to God, this passage says. It's something that reminds him of his prowess.

[36 : 33] Now, of course, we can't understand math literally. It's a way of speaking. But it's a very vivid way of speaking. There's a constant reminder to God about what he is saying.

God, of course, does not need that reminder. As I say, it's a way of speaking. But how vivid the truth that comes from it is, God can never forget his covenant.

That's what the rainbow assures us of. God can never forget his covenant. God will see the rainbow, and God will remember his covenant.

And so the rainbow brings to us the assurance that God's promises in covenant are particularly solvent and binding.

That God's promises have been confirmed and made doubly sure. It's as if God were sneaking an oath and swearing that he will certainly fulfill the same.

[37 : 46] That's the nature of the covenant sign. It's a confirmation given by God himself. that the covenant turns will indeed be fulfilled.

It's God speaking in outward and visible way and saying to us, look at that, there's a proof, there's an evidence, that the promises of the covenant will never fail.

will never go. I hope probably in the Lord's day morning to see a wee bit more about that in regard to the Lord's Supper. But just to apply this in a more general way to the Lord's Supper, remember that that's the nature of the covenant sign.

It's God speaking to us in an outward and visible thing. it's something that is given to us as a proof and as a token that the covenant promise can just never, never fail.

That's what baptism is. That's what the rainbow is. God puts his sign of a child of an adult and says, look at that sign.

[39 : 04] That's a proof that that person is buying. And that's what the Lord is doing for us in the Lord's Supper. It's not basically us meeting the profession of our faith.

It's not us basically seeing something to God. It's God seeing something to us. We think of it as essentially perhaps the means of expressing our faith.

We look upon it as the particular means in the Bible set up, whereby we first confess publicly that Christ is our Savior. And no doubt there's that to it.

But there's something far, far more important than that in the covenant signs of the New Testament as in the Old. It's God speaking. Not in words, but in acts, in visible tokens, assuring us that the covenant promise will never, never fail.

And that's what I want you to look forward to in the Lord's time. I want you to look forward to receiving a token from a friend that you really are facing.

[40 : 27] I want you to listen for the vast crest. And I want you to look at that bread and wine. Not as a means of professing your faith.

Not as a means of your confessing Christ. But a means of Christ confessing you. Because that's what the covenant signs are all about.

God says, you're mine. Here's a token of it. I'll never forget my covenant promise. here's a sign of it. Look at this bread. Break it and take it and eat it. It's for me to you as a proof of the fact that for you I died.

That's what God is saying to us in the covenant promise. That's what we will say in Noah's teaching. Look at the rainbow. There's a sign from me to you that I'll always be tuned to what I've seen.

[41 : 32] I hope that you look forward to that aspect of things in the Lord's account. Now just to sum up here for covenant. What general impact does this make upon us?

Well, I think that the overwhelming thing about a covenant is this. It is absolutely secure. way. When we make a statement and oath, it is absolutely sacrosanct.

It's absolutely secure if we do it honestly. And that's the nature of God's being to us in covenant. He's saying, here's my mercy, here's my grace, and here's a sign for me to you about it, which means that this is absolutely 100% completely and utterly reliable.

God, that's what the covenant is. Promise confirmed, promise backed up by the most powerful arguments, promise set before us as the most reliable of that there is.

That's what we ask you to look to, as a preparation for the Lord's Supper. Look at yourself and see there's no way in which I can make a contact or agreement or a bargain with God.

[42 : 58] There's no getting to that. Look at yourself and see I'm under wrath and I'm under condemnation and if I'm alive since I'm alive with me, it is only because of his mercy and grace towards me.

Look at yourself and see I have no hope but the curse due to me has come up in curse. My only basis of hope for the future is that the condemnation that I deserve has been met by the Lord. And look at the promises of covenant and see these are things that are absolutely secure. I'm going to depend upon them. I'm going to rest from what God has said.

I'm going to take him at his word and rest from that alone. My fears aren't going to bother me. And my frailty and my weaknesses are going to stop me. and my difficulties about the future things aren't going to impede me.

I'm going to come and I'm going to hear his voice at the Lord's table. Because I'm going to further talk for my strengthening and my assurance that it was for me that he died.

[44 : 10] And come and rest of the secure promises of the covenant because the fact of covenant promises means that they are absolutely certain and guaranteed to us in a most unique manner.

There's nothing lacking in what God has given to us in the promises. It is our part to rest upon them and keep them because they are literally secure.

Don't you look at yourself. Look at Christ and see how completely reliable it is. And it's in that spirit that you can come and participate verbally in the Lord's supply.

May God bless to us this meditation in this word. Let's join together in prayer. We pray oh gracious God that we may be able to understand and appreciate something of these great tools that are brought to our attention in the scriptures.

And if you've done what's like to have in these matters before, give to us a special help in grasping them, that they may come home to mind and heart and conscience and will, and that they may firmly influence and achieve their outlook, that they may quicken our faith and stimulate our love and awaited a spirit of devotion.

[45 : 33] So speak to us through your truth, for Jesus' sake. Amen. Now we'll conclude our service by singing in Psalm 111, Psalm 111, from verse 5 to the end of the psalm.

The tune is to Stephen, number 126. Psalm 111, verse 5, he giveth peace unto all those that truly doeth fear, and evermore his covenant he in his mind will bear.

He did the power of his works unto his people show, when he the pretense on the Master's UST Frohe. Verses 5, verse 5. Thank you.