

The Rainbow as a Sign of God's Covenant

Genesis 9:8-17

Genesis 9:8-17 - *"Then God spoke to Noah and to his sons with him, saying: ⁹ "And as for Me, behold, I establish My covenant with you and with 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, of all that go out of the ark, every beast of the earth. ¹¹ Thus I establish My covenant with you: Never again shall all flesh be cut off by the waters of the flood; never again shall there be a flood to destroy the earth."*

¹² 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 perpetual generations: ¹³ I set My rainbow in the cloud, and it shall be for the sign of the covenant between Me and the earth. ¹⁴ It shall be, when I bring a cloud over the earth, that the rainbow shall be seen in the cloud; ¹⁵ and I will remember My covenant which is between Me and you and every living creature of all flesh; the waters shall never again become a flood to destroy all flesh. ¹⁶ The rainbow shall be in the cloud, and I will look on it to remember the everlasting covenant between God and every living creature of all flesh that is on the earth." ¹⁷ And God said to Noah, "This is the sign of the covenant which I have established between Me and all flesh that is on the earth."

Background Notes

Making a covenant was the first item of business between God and mankind after the great Flood of Noah's day. This covenant is known as the Noachic Covenant, for obvious reasons. With whom did God make this covenant? *"Then God spoke to Noah and to his sons with him, saying: "And as for Me, behold, I establish My covenant with you **and with your descendants after you**" (v8-9) [emphasis added].*

Who are Noah's descendants? Everyone - including you and me! So the stipulations and promises of the Noachic Covenant of Genesis 9 are for **all mankind**. Contained in this covenant that God made with man is the biblical authority for human government on this earth. The Noachic Covenant gives nations the right to maintain law and order, even to the extent of imposing capital punishment for murder. In addition, under the Noachic Covenant God gave mankind permission to use animals as food.

In the Noachic Covenant, God promised He would never again destroy life on this earth with a worldwide flood: *"I will remember My covenant which is between Me and you and every living creature of all flesh; the waters shall never again become a flood to destroy all flesh" (v15).*

The rainbow is the sign that God gave as confirmation of the Noahic Covenant. *“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 perpetual generations. I set My rainbow in the cloud, and it shall be for the sign of the covenant between Me and the earth” (v12-13).* Notice that all successive generations includes you and me today. So the rainbow is the sign of the Noahic Covenant.

God gave confirming signs for a number of His biblical covenants. The sign of the Abrahamic Covenant was circumcision. The sign of the Mosaic Covenant was the Sabbath. And the sign of the Noahic Covenant was - and still is - the rainbow.

Doctrinal Points

1. The rainbow is a guarantee that God cares for His creatures.

In verses 9-10 God said, *“As for Me, behold, I establish My covenant with you and with your descendants¹ after you, ¹⁰and with every living creature that is with you: the birds, the cattle, and every beast of the earth with you, of all that go out of the ark, every beast of the earth.”*

Whenever you look at a rainbow, don't just admire its beauty! Remember that it is a guarantee that God has given us to remind us that He cares for His creatures, both people and animals. And when you see a double rainbow, don't just exclaim “ooh” and “ah” - that the double rainbow doubly emphasizes that God cares for you! (Instead say, “God cares for me, God cares for me!” [laughter] - and when people standing around you say, “What is wrong with you?” take that opportunity to share with them what the rainbow is all about!) A rainbow is the sign of God's covenant with man, and a guarantee that God cares for all His creatures.

Do you know what causes a rainbow? (Here we go on a mini-physics lecture again!) A rainbow is caused by the dispersion of sunlight shining through raindrops. We look for rainbows when the sun comes out after it has just been raining - right? Well, there were no rainbows before the Flood, because there was no rain before the Flood. Before the Flood the ground was watered by *“a mist that went up” (Genesis 2:6).*

It's possible that a water vapor canopy surrounded the earth before the Flood, creating a greenhouse effect. This may have been “the waters above the firmament” mentioned in Genesis 1:7: *“Thus God made the firmament, and divided the waters which were under the firmament from the waters which were above the firmament...”* On the second day of creation God made an expanse, the firmament, to divide the waters from below the expanse from the waters above. So it's quite likely that a water vapor canopy surrounded the earth before the Flood, and very possibly that was one of the sources for all the water of the Flood. Genesis 7:11 says that God caused the *“fountains of the deep”* (subterranean waters) to burst forth, and the *“floodgates of heaven”* (possibly a water vapor canopy) to precipitate in the form of torrential rain.

In any case, rainbows were not possible before the Flood because there was no rain. When the water vapor canopy was gone and the Flood was over, rainbows were not only possible, but God chose the rainbow as the sign of His guarantee that He cares for His creatures.

1 Peter 5:7 says, “*Cast all your anxiety on him because he cares for you.*” Remember, the rainbow is a guarantee that God cares for His creatures.

2. The rainbow is a guarantee that God keeps His promises.

Verse 15: “*I will remember My covenant which is between Me and you and every living creature of all flesh; the waters shall never again become a flood to destroy all flesh.*”

God promised that He would never again send a worldwide flood. Has God kept His promise? The answer is obvious. So the rainbow is a *guarantee* that God keeps His promises!

In verse 16, the Hebrew word translated “rainbow” is just “*bow*.” “*The bow shall be in the cloud, and I will look on it to remember the everlasting covenant between God and every living creature of all flesh that is on the earth.*” The Hebrew word used for “*bow*” is the same as the Hebrew word used for a bow that would be used in battle. In ancient days, when peace covenants or treaties were made, the armies would put away or hang up their battle bows, symbolic of the fact that there was now peace.

What an interesting picture! It has been suggested that this is exactly the picture portrayed in verse 13. When God said “*I set my bow in the cloud,*” in essence He was saying: I am hanging up my battle bow. I’m putting away my bow and pledging my peace - and I keep my promises.

So every time we see a rainbow in the sky, let’s remember that it’s a guarantee that God keeps His promises - not just the promise that there will be no more worldwide floods, but **all His promises!**

God has given us many promises in His Word. Let’s just look at one from the New Testament. In Hebrews 13:5 Jesus said, “*I will never leave you or forsake you.*” What a promise! Are you lonely? Remember that Jesus said, “*I will never leave you or forsake you.*” Others may leave you or forsake you, but not our Lord Jesus. Employers may forsake you. Friends may move away. Even your children or your spouse may leave you or forsake you. But if you have put your faith and trust in Jesus Christ, you can be sure that He will **never** leave you or forsake you. Our Lord Jesus has promised, God has promised, that He will never leave us or forsake us.

Remember that truth the next time you see a rainbow. The rainbow is a guarantee that God keeps His promises.

Practical Application

There's more than a pot of gold for us at the end of the rainbow!

We've all heard the legend that there's a pot of gold at the end of every rainbow. When you heard that myth for the first time as a child, how many of you thought that there really was a pot of gold at the end of the rainbow? And how many of you still think there is a pot of gold at the end of the rainbow? [laughter] Well, according to the Bible there is **more** than a pot of gold for us at the end of the rainbow!

Revelation 4:3 describes a heavenly scene of the throne of God. *"And He who sat there was like a jasper and a sardius stone in appearance; and there was a rainbow around the throne, in appearance like an emerald."* Notice the rainbow around the throne of God. It's an eternal symbol to remind us that God keeps His promises!

When we're in Heaven, and we're at the end of earthly rainbows, here's what we can expect: *"And God will wipe away every tear from their eyes; there shall be no more death, nor sorrow, nor crying. There shall be no more pain, for the former things have passed away"* (Revelation 21:4). Isn't that better than a pot of gold? No more tears! No more sorrow! No more crying! No more pain! These things will have passed away. **Much** better than a pot of gold! Even better than that, we'll be with the Lord Jesus, and God Himself will wipe away our tears!

You can keep your earthly pots of gold – they can't even begin to compare to enjoying the presence of God forever! The only requirement for us to enjoy this eternal blessing is to make sure that we're in the family of God now. I trust that everyone hearing this Talk has received Jesus Christ as personal Savior and is in the family of God. If you're a believer, you are already saved forever. And remember, there's more than a pot of gold for us at the end of the rainbow!