



Protect

All people are to value all human life.

GENESIS 9:1-15

History demonstrates that human beings have a propensity to devalue others. Prejudice based on skin color or ethnicity is one manifestation of this truth. Child abuse, sexual abuse, spousal abuse, neglect of the elderly, abortions, and bullying likewise are expressions of the devaluing of human life. In Genesis 9, God declares that He values all human life, and so should we.

- **What would our world look like if all people valued every human life?**

UNDERSTAND **THE CONTEXT**

GENESIS 9:1-29

There are two main sections in Genesis 9. Verses 1-17 relate how God made a covenant with Noah, his descendants, and all the earth. God's words to Noah echoed His words to Adam in Genesis 1:28-30, indicating that God was initiating a new beginning with Noah as the head of the new family of humanity. God's words to Noah repeat God's expectation for humanity to be fruitful and multiply and fill the earth. Furthermore, just as God told Adam he could eat everything in the garden with the exception of the tree of the knowledge of good and evil, God told Noah that he could eat plants and now animals with the exception of consuming their blood as an indication of God's high value of life.

God established a formal covenant with Noah as a way to communicate His value of all of the earth and of humanity in particular. He declared His intention to bless His creation and to continue to give humanity dominion over it. God made this covenant to communicate not only His expectations of humanity and the rest of creation but also to clearly declare that He holds all of life as sacred, especially the lives of every human being, given He created them in His image.

Verses 18-29 demonstrate humanity's continued inclination to sin and God's merciful and gracious faithfulness to humanity in spite of it. Moses wrote this narrative first for Israel as they were preparing to enter the land of Canaan. While Noah's drunkenness and self-exposure are not condoned, the emphasis is on Ham's dishonorable conduct when he saw Noah. This is in contrast to Japheth and Shem's honorable response to their father, who then blessed them. The passage sets the stage for the curse that God placed on Ham's descendants, the Canaanites, and anticipates the wicked people they will become. Consequently, after centuries of God's patience with the Canaanites, now God intended to use Israel, descendants of Shem, as His instrument of judgment against them.



Read Genesis 9:1-15. What do these verses communicate about God's character and His expectations of humanity?

EXPLORE **THE TEXT**

THE BLESSING (GEN. 9:1-4)

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.”

VERSE 1

God’s act of blessing is a prominent theme in Genesis. In Genesis, God’s blessing means He bestows prosperity and empowerment: prosperity concerning the fruitfulness of both the land and the living, and empowerment to those who receive His blessing to actually attain all that God has promised them. In all things, God is the source of blessing, even should He choose to use others as His instrument of blessing.

God’s blessing of Noah echoes His blessing of Adam to be “fruitful and multiply and fill the earth,” and it is the second time God communicated this to Noah (Gen. 1:28; 8:17). Even though God destroyed every living thing on the earth besides those who resided in the ark, it was still God’s will that humans should increase and fill the earth. The Lord’s giving of children is universal evidence of His blessing; children truly are a blessing from God. Therefore, they are to be cherished as people made in the image of God.

VERSES 2-3

Verse 2 indicates that there would be a change in the relationship between the animal kingdom and humanity. Before the flood, humans were appointed to subdue and rule over the animals, but there does not seem to be any evidence of hostility between them. However now, the words “subdue” and “rule” are missing, suggesting that in the post-flood world it would be a much more hostile environment and difficult for humans. All four types of creatures on the earth and in the seas are to remain under the authority of humanity, but these creatures now will live in fear and terror of humans. They will not be a threat to humans; instead, humans will now be a threat to these creatures. The threat of humans to animals would be heightened by the adjustment to

humanity's diet. The preflood dietary provisions for humans are altered and expanded from just green plants to include animal proteins. The life and death of animals will now be in the hands of humans.

Disregarding the gift of life reveals a disregard for God, the Creator of all life.

VERSE 4

Given the new dietary provision of including animal proteins in the human diet, God provided one prohibition in regard to it, just as He gave Adam and Eve one prohibition in the Garden of Eden regarding the tree of the knowledge of good and evil. Here, God prohibited eating raw meat that had the animal's **lifeblood** in it. This led to the commandment in Deuteronomy 12:24 that called for the draining of an animal's blood before eating it.

This prohibition had nothing to do with decorum but everything to do with the fact that blood represents the essence of life (Lev. 17:11). All of life is precious to God; therefore, it should be precious to humanity.

Even though God expanded the diet of humans to include the meat of animals, these living creatures are valuable to God and should be properly cared for instead of being subject to wanton abuse. God's allowing the killing of animals for food included a stewardship and responsibility to care for these creatures that God deemed "very good" when He created them on the sixth day (Gen. 1:29-31). Therefore, it is no surprise that the Mosaic law commanded that animals as well as humans enjoy rest on the sabbath (Ex. 20:10; 23:12; Deut. 5:14). Disregarding the gift of life reveals a disregard for God, the Creator of all life.

 **Why did God put special emphasis on the blood of animals?**

THE WARNING (GEN. 9:5-7)

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.”

VERSES 5-6

After highlighting the value of all life in verse 4, verse 5 emphasizes the value of human life. It contains three statements emphasizing that God will demand an accounting for the taking of a human life. First, God **will require a penalty for your lifeblood**. This designates the principle in general: the taking of a human life is forbidden and anyone guilty of doing so will have to answer to God. The second statement declares that if an **animal** takes the life of a person, that *animal* must be put to death. The third statement follows suit, stating the same consequence for a person who **murders a fellow human**. Verse 5 lays the foundation for the putting down of an animal that has killed a person and capital punishment for murderers (Ex. 21:12,22-25,28-32). That there is no such law concerning the killing of animals demonstrates that human life is of greater value than the lives of animals.

To take a person's life is to usurp God's sovereignty over life and death.

Verse 6 specifies why the taking of a human life is an offense to God: **God made humans in his image**. This offense is rooted in the special status and ultimate value God conferred to every person when He created them (Gen. 1:27). To take a person's life is to usurp God's sovereignty over life and death (Deut. 32:39). The severe penalty for murder highlights the sanctity of human life. This truth should give every person pause when we consider the words of John in 1 John 3:15: “Everyone who hates his brother or sister is a murderer.” Such hatred is not only an offense against a brother or sister, but also an egregious offense against God.

KEY DOCTRINE: Man

The sacredness of human personality is evident in that God created man in His own image, and in that Christ died for man; therefore, every person of every race possesses full dignity and is worthy of respect and Christian love. (See Exodus 20:13; Matthew 5:43-48; John 15:12.)

VERSE 7

God concluded His instruction to Noah by repeating the exhortation He began with in verse 1, but with the added emphasis of ***and multiply on it***. God’s will for Noah’s family and his descendants was to enjoy His blessing of fruitfulness. However, this would only happen if they would abstain from the wickedness that pervaded the earth before the flood and instead walk with God as Noah did.

- Why does being made in God’s image place a different value on human life?
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THE COVENANT (GEN. 9:8-15)

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.”

VERSES 8-10

God announced that He was now ***establishing*** the covenant that He promised Noah before the flood (Gen. 6:18). In 6:18, God simply stated, “my covenant with you.” Here, God included ***your descendants after you and with every living creature that is with you***. The way God expressed it placed emphasis on Himself and what He was doing, literally saying “Now I—behold Me—I am establishing My covenant.”

What’s more, during this interaction with Noah, God used the word “establish” three times, employing Hebrew verb constructions communicating, “I’m about to establish my covenant” (v. 9), “I am

establishing my covenant” (v. 11), and “I have established my covenant” (v. 17). By doing this, God emphatically assured Noah that He would be faithful to keep this covenant with Noah, his descendants, and every creature on earth.

VERSES 11-15

God will *never again* use a *flood to destroy the earth*. This is the first time there is mention of a *sign* accompanying a covenant. Later, both circumcision with the Abrahamic covenant and the Sabbath with the Sinai covenant would serve as examples of signs of a covenant (Gen. 17:11; Ex. 31:16-17). Whether it be a miracle (Deut. 6:22), an event (Ex. 3:12), a mark (Gen. 17:11), or a national custom (Ex. 31:13-17), a sign symbolically pointed beyond itself to God—what He has done, is doing, or planning to do in the future. Signs in the Old Testament may be closely tied to God’s relationship with the entire world (Gen. 9:8-17), with His people (Ex. 31:13-17), or with an individual (Isa. 7:10-16).

Here, the sign was attached to the covenant to visually confirm God’s commitment. It is *between* God and Noah and every living creature *for all future generations*, even though God is the only one acting. Nothing is required of anyone but God in this covenant. Accordingly, the sign is a symbol of God’s ongoing mercy and grace.

God placed His rainbow in the clouds to show that the threat of the dark clouds of judgment by way of a flood is no more. The word for *bow* here in Hebrew is the same word used for a bow that was used for hunting or in warfare. It is interesting to note that the *bow* faces upward and not down toward the earth, showing that God will no longer use the clouds as His instrument of judgment on the entire earth.

The rainbow should remind us that we need God’s mercy and grace, and that His judgment is sure.

Whenever the storm clouds come, the bow is a reminder that God is remembering His covenant and is keeping His vow. When God “remembers,” it is an expression denoting He is faithful to act upon His promises. Just as God remembered Noah, saved him and his family in the ark and brought them out of it safely, the bow demonstrates God will remember this covenant. As a sign, the bow was given to prompt people to recall what happened with the flood and to realize they can trust in God’s mercy and grace to never again use a flood to destroy the earth.

However, the rainbow should also remind us that we need God's mercy and grace, and that His judgment is sure. Peter warns us that in the last days there will be scoffers concerning the Lord's coming as surely as there were scoffers as Noah built the ark. Peter declared, "Through these the world of that time perished when it was flooded. By the same word, the present heavens and earth are stored up for fire, being kept for the day of judgment and destruction of the ungodly." (2 Pet. 3:6-7). The rainbow should remind us of God's patience, the opportunity we have now to trust in Him, and that the window of opportunity to do so will not last forever.

○ **How does God's promise to preserve life impact the way humans should treat each other and respect all human life?**

BIBLE SKILL: *Use multiple Scripture passages to understand the Sanctity of Life.*

Read the following passages: Genesis 1:27; 9:5-6; Job 33:4; Psalms 100:3; 139:14-16; Isaiah 64:8; and Matthew 5:21-22. Write down what each teaches about the value of life. When you have finished reading and responding to each passage, write out your own statement of belief regarding the sanctity of life.

APPLY THE TEXT

- + Believers are to be stewards of God’s provisions.
- + Believers are to stand up for those who have been murdered.
- + Believers are to reflect God’s values and priorities in His creation.

With your Bible study group, identify people who are devalued in your community. Plan ways to minister to them.

In your day-to-day activities, what are some ways you can reflect the value God places on people? Where are your values and priorities different from God’s? What needs to change?

Memorize Genesis 9:6.

Prayer Needs
