

Introduction

A new dispensation begins with Noah leaving the Ark and the revelation that God gives in this chapter. We call it the dispensation of human government because man is given the ultimate sanction, capital punishment. This implies a governmental structure where man in his corporate arrangements can mete out this punishment on individuals.

1. Restatement and Modifications to the Dominion Mandate, vv. 1-7**A. Restatement of the Dominion Mandate, vv. 1-2, 7**

This is basically a restatement of a portion of Genesis 1:28, the dominion mandate. Man has dominion over the earth and its animals. He is to fill the earth with his children. Notice that the humans will be feared by animals. This is going to be reversed in the millennial kingdom (Isaiah 11:6-9).

B. Animals are now Food, v. 3-4

Apparently until this point, God had made allowance for men to eat only from among the plant kingdom (v. 3—“even as the green herbs”). However, now He expands that to include animals as food for mankind. Certainly, man may have “jumped the gun” and eaten meat before he was supposed to, but the Bible does not tell us specifically.

These verses makes it very difficult to justify a vegetarian diet or vegan practice (Veganism is the more broad term which disallows not only the eating of animal products, but the use of animal products such as leather or silk for clothing and other animal byproducts for things like lotions.)

This statement also confirms the dominion mandate, that man has the ultimate power over animals. To raise animals to the level of humans is not Biblical—no matter how smart the animals may be. Certainly you have heard of cases where people are imprisoned for bad treatment of animals, yet we see the killing of babies all around us.

This authority over animals, however, does not allow man to drink the blood of animals. Blood is to be poured out. The Mosaic Law prescribed the same thing (Lev. 17:14, Deut. 12:23; cf. John 6:53 for a thought-provoking passage; cf. also Acts 15:29).

C. Capital Punishment Instituted, vv. 5-6

The Bible is very clear here about a couple of points. First, murder is only punishable by death—there is no other appropriate punishment for it. This applies whether the murderer is a man or animal. Second, the reason for this harsh punishment is that man is made in the image of God and has intrinsic value. The prescribed punishment is the only one that fits the crime. In other words, the crime is inherently wrong in God’s sight; it is not just a punishment set by society.

The punishment has several advantages. First, it prevents the offender from repeating his crime and harming someone else. Second, it tends to be a deterrent when executed quickly. If the punishment is not executed quickly, it loses its deterrent factor (Eccl. 8:11).

One application of this is that the pit bull dog that kills a person is to be summarily dispatched, with no questions asked. In fact, in the Mosaic Law, the

owner of the animal was also responsible if the animal was known to be dangerous to people. If the animal killed a person, the owner was punished by death in such cases (Exodus 21:28-31).

This passage also helps us think about capital punishment in the modern scene. Many liberals are horrified by the taking of a life for murder, in saying that they oppose this, they actual devalue the life that was already snuffed out.

2. The Covenant Signified by the Rainbow, vv. 8-17**A. The Covenant, vv. 8-11**

The covenant is made by God to be unconditional (v. 8-9). It is made with Noah, all of humankind, and every living creature. He will “never” destroy all living creatures by means of a flood (v. 11). This is very certain and strong language. We can be assured that God will fulfill this promise.

However, God did not promise that the earth would never be destroyed again—the next time, it will be by means of fire (2 Peter 3:7, 10, 11, 12).

B. The Sign of the Covenant, vv. 12-17

The sign of the covenant was made to be the rainbow. By it, God will be reminded of His promise to not flood out the earth.

The rainbow probably existed before this point. It does not seem reasonable that the physics of light and the prism-like properties of water would be changed to make rainbows possible at this late stage in history. It is just that with God’s promise, the rainbow is invested with new meaning. This may be likened to the symbol of baptism. It existed before it was done by Christians (John’s baptism and Jewish baptisms) but was invested with totally new meaning and symbolism by Jesus Christ.

3. The Sin of Noah and Prophecy about his Children, vv. 18-29**A. The Initial Genealogy of Noah, vv. 18-19**

This is an “initial” genealogy because a much more detailed one occurs in the next chapter. But this passage reminds us of the three sons, Shem, Ham, and Japheth. It also mentions one son of Ham, namely Canaan, as he comes into the account in the next verses.

From these three sons the whole earth was populated, just like it was from Adam and Eve. There is no one today who does not trace their genealogy back to these three men and their wives. This is because the extent of the flood was universal (see the last set of notes) and no one besides these 8 people survived (1 Peter 3:20).

B. The Sins of Noah and Ham, vv. 20-23

In this case, one sin lead to another. So it is for us. The account says that Noah was a farmer and kept a vineyard. The fruit of his labor was wine, on which he became drunk. As is often the case when this happens, shameful things can occur. Noah became exposed, and his middle son observed it.

Instead of discreetly handling the problem of his father, he broadcast it to his brothers. The Bible does not explain specifically his motivation for doing so, but obviously it was not wholesome. His elder and younger brothers did the right thing by carefully covering up their father in his drunken state.

C. The Prophecy of Noah, vv. 24-27

Basically, the prophecy lays out a curse on Canaan, the son of Ham. It also pronounces a blessing on Shem and Japheth and declares that Canaan and his descendants will be servant to both of his brothers. Chapter 10 tells us basically that Japheth's descendants are the Europeans and Asians, that Ham's descendants were those who populated the Middle East and Africa, and Shem's descendants (the Semitic peoples) populated the Middle East and Israel. How this prophecy works out is unclear as to all its details. Some have suggested that this predicts the slavery of Africans (and others, incredibly, use it to justify that historical practice).

This is one of those "father-son" passages in the sense that a father commits a sin, and it appears that the son and future generations pay for it. How does this square with the Biblical teaching that the son will not bear the sin of the father (Ezek. 18:19-20)?

We have to understand that the consequences of sin can prevail for many generations in that it sets an example and environment where the wicked ways are propagated from father to son. 1 Kings 22:52 gives an example of Ahaziah who walked in the way of his father and mother and ancestor Jeroboam. Certainly the example and actions of his parents had a great effect on him as a youth.

Another example is in Exodus 20:5 where the Lord says that the iniquity of the fathers will affect the children to the third and fourth generation. The operative phrase is found at the end of the verse, where it says "those who hate Me." Not only do the fathers hate God, but it seems that the children do the same. You can see how this would come about (an atheist father often will raise an atheist son). The same notion occurs in Exodus 34:7, Numbers 14:18, and Deuteronomy 5:9.

We can observe a third, country-wide example in the modern day. Those countries whose rulers are communist or Islamic long ago tried to banish or severely limit the presence of the gospel in their lands. Those countries reap the fruit of those decisions now, even many years later.

The upshot of all this is that the son is not punished for the sins of his father, though his father's sins do affect him. The son is punished for his own sins.

More basically, remember that the Bible does teach that the sin of Adam is imputed to all people, and that his depraved nature is passed on to them through their parents. In this case, Adam's sin had HUGE consequences, consequences that caused further sin.

D. The Death of Noah, vv. 28-29

Noah lived 350 years after the flood, for a total of 950 years. Even though he found grace in the eyes of the Lord, was just, was perfect in his generations, and walked with God (Genesis 6:8-9), he still died. Sin always results in death. It is a sad appendix on his life that he could not control himself with his wine.

Conclusion

Certain responsibilities and promises from this chapter carry on today. The rainbow certainly is still with us. Capital punishment is still in force for those who are murderers. We can still eat meat. How relevant the chapter still is!