

Text: Genesis 9:1-29

Title: Dispensation of Human Government

Truth: God gives world-wide instruction about stewardship of the earth, diet, capital punishment, and His rainbow covenant.

Date/Location: October 16, 2022 at FBC (rev. from January 8, 2006)

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 such punishment on individuals. We assume then that God permits less severe sanctions.

I. Restatement and Modifications to the Dominion Mandate, vv. 1-7

A. Restatement of the Dominion Mandate, vv. 1, 7

1. This is a restatement of a portion of Genesis 1:28, the dominion mandate. Man has dominion over the earth and its animals.
2. He is to fill the earth with his children. The blessing of reproduction is still our portion in the human race, and with the healthcare and prosperity that we have, it is much easier to multiply than in past millennia. However, people want to use abortion as birth control, have fewer children, and spend on themselves rather than the next generation. People talk about over-population and their desire for population reduction. This is just exactly what you would expect sinners to talk about, because for some perverse reason, sinners always want to do the opposite of what God wants. It is similar with most of the institutions of Genesis 9.

B. Animals are now Food, v. 2-4

1. Now humans will be feared by animals. The human-animal relationship was not strained before the flood but will be so now. This will be changed in great measure in the millennial kingdom when animals will be friendly with people (Isaiah 11:6-9).

2. Until this point, God had made allowance for men to eat from the plant kingdom. In verse 3 the phrase, “even as the green herbs” indicates that plants were fair game before this point. Gen. 1:29 is clear that God gave the human race “every herb...and every tree...to you it shall be for food.” However, now He expands that to include animals as food for humanity. Certainly, man may have “jumped the gun” and eaten meat before he was supposed to, but the Bible does not tell us that specifically.
3. These verses make it impossible to demand a vegetarian diet or vegan practice (Veganism is the broader 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.) Maintaining a vegetarian diet is not wrong, but it is wrong to demand others to do so. Spend some time “digesting” Romans 14:1-13 on this point. We know that the Jewish prophet Daniel requested such a diet (Daniel 1:11-16) so that he would not be ceremonially defiled. This diet was the “safest” to maintain kosher and not have to worry about pork or other forbidden meat from entering his mouth. Daniel was a righteous man, so we can be sure it is OK to maintain that sort of diet if one wishes to do so.
4. If we trust God, we will not struggle to understand that He must have had very good reasons for permitting meat in the diet of his creatures—even though it resulted in the death of animals. Some simple research yields the information that meat is much more calorically dense than vegetables because its calories come from protein and fat. It seems reasonable to suspect that the post-flood world would be even more harsh in environment and climate than the pre-flood world was, and this would necessitate people to consume more energy to be able to meet the demands of the new world.
5. The Lord’s statement about animals 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 cruel treatment of animals, yet we see the killing of babies all around us with no repercussions at

all. Pay attention: there is no true Christian who will stand for the mistreatment of animals. But killing an animal for food is *not* a sin.

6. Paradoxically one way to ensure the flourishing of any species of animal is to permit them to be “farmed.” If they become the responsibility of farmers, the farmers will ensure that the species survives and multiplies, because that will mean more profit for them—even if a large number of the animals are harvested for food! In other words, taking seriously the dominion mandate helps the species do better *as a species* than it would in raw nature.
7. This authority over animals, however, does not allow man to drink the blood of animals. Their 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, vv. 5-6

1. Earlier this week, a jury decided that Parkland School shooter Nicholas Cruz would get the sentence of life in prison without the opportunity of parole—instead of the death sentence. Florida law required the jury to come to a unanimous decision to carry out the death penalty. Several jurors would not accept the death penalty, so the lesser penalty is his portion. The victimized families, and many in the nation, are deeply troubled that justice has not been served, some even vengefully so. Their loved ones are gone, but the murderer remains and will be housed, fed, have medical treatment, and have other “benefits” for the rest of his life. Incarceration is a mercy to this man, especially since he does not know Jesus Christ and the moment he dies, he will face a far worse punishment.
2. Most humans know in their hearts that the death penalty is sometimes the only appropriate recourse. They know that if the death penalty does not apply in a case like *this one*, then it is hard to imagine a case where it *would* apply. How much more than killing 17 people, wounding 14 others, and terrorizing countless others does it take before the death penalty becomes viable?
3. The Bible is clear in Gen. 9:5-6 about a couple of points. **First**, murder is punishable by death. There is no other appropriate

“equal value” punishment for it. This applies whether the murderer is a man or animal. **Second**, the reason for this harsh punishment is that **God made man in the image of God and so we has extremely high intrinsic value**. Things can be replaced; lives cannot. A person is by design, creation, and definition one of a kind—even if a twin or triplet! The prescribed punishment is the *only* one that fits the crime.

4. The crime of murder is inherently wrong in *God’s sight*; it is not just a punishment set by society or a moral created by the majority. It is always wrong in all places and in all cultures. [Murder is different than killing. Someone may kill in war and be totally justified; or kill a home invader and be innocent; and a person who is an executioner for the state is also guiltless.]
5. There are good reasons for capital punishment besides obedience to God. **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). **Third**, it gives proper closure with a sense of justice to the crime’s many victims. **Fourth**, it gives due weight to the *life* that was taken away prematurely.
6. You might object that the criminal person has some deficiency, some problem in their upbringing, or some other mitigating factor. That is something to think about, but it means that this person may be *more likely* to kill again. The death penalty will ensure they never can do that again. If placed in prison, the murderer would endanger other prisoners there who do not deserve the death penalty.
7. Happily, God does not implement the death penalty on all humans for their sin—which does deserve death (Romans 6:23). God did, however, implement the death penalty upon His own Son so He could stand in as substitute for us. What a mercy that is!
8. One application of all this is that the pit bull 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).

9. This passage also helps us think about capital punishment in the modern scene. Many liberals and progressives are horrified by the taking of a life for murder. In opposing capital punishment, they devalue the life that was taken away, downplay the suffering of the family from whom that life was taken, and endanger the entire society.

II. The Covenant Signified by the Rainbow, vv. 8-17

A. The Covenant, vv. 8-11

1. God mentions the covenant in 8:21-22 and details it in chapter 9. He made it to be unconditional (v. 8-9). He made it 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.
2. However, God did not promise that the earth would never be destroyed again by other means. The next time, He will judge it by means of fire (2 Peter 3:7, 10, 11, 12).

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

1. The sign of the covenant is the rainbow. By it, God will be reminded of His promise to not flood out the earth, and so will we.
2. The rainbow probably existed before this point and was re-signified. Whether it did or did not exist matters little to the point of the passage. It does not seem reasonable that the physics of light and the prism-like properties of water would change 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 it was invested with totally new meaning and symbolism by Jesus Christ.

III. The Sin of Noah and Prophecy about his Children, vv. 18-29

A. The Initial Genealogy of Noah, vv. 18-19

1. 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 parenthetically mentions one son of Ham, namely Canaan, because he comes into the account in the next verses.
2. 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 notes on chapters 6-7) and no one besides these eight people survived (1 Peter 3:20).

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

1. In this case, one sin led to another. The same is true for all of us. The account says that Noah was a farmer and kept a vineyard. The fruit of his labor was grapes, which he turned into wine, on which he became drunk. As is often the case when this happens, shameful things occur. Noah became exposed, and Ham observed.
2. Instead of showing respect for his father and thus discreetly handling the problem of his father’s exposure, he broadcast it to his brothers. Maybe it was funny to him, some sick perversion. The Bible does not explain specifically his motivation for broadcasting the matter, but obviously his thinking was not wholesome and upright. His elder and younger brothers did the right thing by carefully covering up their father in his drunken state. Notice how they maintained his dignity and their own.

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

1. 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, especially Egypt (Psalm 105:23), 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.¹

2. This is one of those “father-son” passages in the sense that a father commits a sin, and 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)?
 - a. We must 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 profound effect on him as a youth.
 - b. 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 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.
 - c. 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

¹ Some have suggested that this predicts the slavery of Africans while others, incredibly, use it to justify that historical practice. Neither are true. I wrote on this at <https://www.fbcaa.org/MattPostiffBlog/2015/06/One-Race>. Briefly, the wrong view says that God cursed Noah's son Ham, sent him to a tropical climate, and darkened his skin in punishment for what he did to his dad. I reply: This is an old and very bad interpretation of Genesis 9:21-27. It is especially odious because it was used to justify the enslavement of black people. I challenge you to review the passage and show from the text (1) that Ham uncovered Noah; (2) that God sent Ham to a tropical climate; (3) that God miraculously darkened Ham's skin; and (4) that God cursed Ham at all. I don't find those assertions anywhere in the text, yet some falsely teach so. Here are the facts: (1) Noah became uncovered by himself because he was drunk; (2) The text doesn't say God sent Ham to a tropical climate; (3) The text doesn't say that God darkened Ham's skin; and (4) God did not curse Ham—the text says that Noah cursed *Canaan*!

gospel in their lands. Those countries reap the fruit of those decisions now, even many years later. Millions of individuals in those countries are impacted by the decisions of former leaders and adopt as their own a mindset opposed to the gospel.

- d. 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. In this case, Ham had an unbridled perversion in his heart which he passed on to his son Canaan. The same moral stain on the father became active in the life of the son, and the son received the same curse because he was involved in the same kind of behavior. Like father, like son. It is evident in later Old Testament accounts that the Canaanites were a reprobate people in terms of sexual immorality, idolatry, child sacrifice, etc.
3. Speaking to a more basic underlying truth, 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 that caused further sin and that impacts us personally.

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

1. 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 except for a *small* handful of cases.
2. It is a sad appendix on his life that he could not control himself with wine. The fact that a man of Noah's caliber could not exercise proper self-control is a very good reason to stay away from alcohol entirely.

Conclusion

Certain responsibilities and promises from this chapter carry on today. God wants the human race to **reproduce**, but people want to depopulate, abort, and birth-control their way out of that responsibility. The **rainbow** certainly is still with us, though it has

been invalidly appropriated by those who oppose God's morality. **Capital punishment** is still permitted for those who are murderers, but mankind has become squishy and does not want to implement God's directive. Lawlessness abounds and where punishment is not swift and certain, lawlessness only grows. We can still **eat meat**, but some of us eat too much and others claim it is cruel to do so.

It would be hard to say that this chapter of the Bible is irrelevant today, even though it records events and God's instructions from 5,000 years ago!

MAP