

# **THE GREATEST PROMISE**

## **A Sermon on Genesis 9**

by Dr. Richard Gamble

“The creator chose a people, promised a coming Messiah to create a worldwide people.”

### **I. INTRODUCTION**

I have five daughters, and they all love kittens. Boys and puppy dogs seem to go together like ham and eggs. We adults like animals too — each one of us, I am sure, has a favorite.

This is part of God’s plan for our lives on earth. In Genesis 9:2 we read, “The fear and dread of you [humans] will fall upon all the beasts of the earth.” Even very large animals like cows and horses can be domesticated. For example, when we wanted to move a large dairy cow weighing 1,200 lbs., even our 6-year-old Liesl could scare these big bovines to go left or right.

But there are other animals that are not afraid of any of us. An old Presbyterian minister told this true story related by his mother: She had a relative who was a British army officer in India at the turn of the century. That officer had a tiger cub as a pet. The tiger cub did everything with him. And the cub grew and grew. One day the officer was writing at his desk and the cub was asleep on the floor beside him. The officer fell asleep too. Earlier that day, the officer had cut his hand. But while he was asleep, the tiger licked his master’s cut hand and tasted his blood. The warm, fresh blood aroused a change. The officer woke to a raging tiger with ears pinned back, snarling teeth and steel muscles about to pounce.

He had just enough time to whip out his revolver and shoot the tiger right there.

These terrifying animals are part of God's plan too. God says in Genesis 9:5 that he will demand an accounting even from an animal that takes away a human life. God's great plan is to protect and preserve human life. As we look at Genesis 9, we will learn that it was God's plan not only to protect and preserve human life, but to bring us to eternal life.

## **II. THE COVENANT WITH NOAH.**

Before the flood, God planned to make a covenant with Noah: "But I will establish my covenant with you: and you shall enter the ark" (Gen. 6:18). After the flood, God carried out this intention: "Now behold I myself do establish My covenant with you, and with your descendants after you and with every living creature that is with you" (Gen. 9:9).

In this covenant, God purposed never to destroy all human life and the earth again (8:20-22; 9:11), even though nothing about man had fundamentally changed. Man was still evil and depraved as he had been previously. In Genesis 6:5, before the flood, we read that the imaginations of man's heart are evil. In Genesis 8:21, after the flood, we hear the same again. Even so, after the flood, although men's hearts are still wicked, God promises that he will not continually destroy the earth.

God gave ordinances for life on earth (Gen. 9:1-7). We were to populate the earth, to protect human life on the earth, and to be sustained in life from the earth. What a gracious command of God! Adam had been condemned for sin and the earth had been destroyed because of sin — but God protected life despite sin!

God's covenant with Noah included a rainbow (Gen. 9:13-15), unlike the later covenants which would require a bloody sacrifice. This covenant was primitive. Nevertheless it was a type of a greater covenant (compare Isaiah 54: 1-10).

### **III. THE PROPHECY OF NOAH (9: 20-27).**

After building a great ark and surviving an awful flood, Noah's son Ham sinned terribly against Noah. Can you imagine that? Following the great sin, Noah spoke a prophecy from God: Canaan (Ham's son) would be cursed, and would be a servant to his brothers. God through Noah said: "Blessed be the Lord God of Shem . . . may God enlarge Japheth and may he dwell in the tents of Shem" (Gen. 9: 26ff.)

The first part of the prophecy could rightly be translated: "Blessed be Jehova, because he is willing to be the God of Shem." This is the first time in the Bible that God is specified as the God of a people. If that is not exciting enough, God also promises that the Gentiles will conquer the holy land and will live in the presence of God just like the children of Shem. That is the meaning of the phrase concerning Japheth, whose people were the coastland Gentiles (Gen. 10:5), dwelling in the tents of Shem.

### **IV. SUMMARY**

God is powerful, and he is the Lord. The Lord God is just and punishes sin. But he is also gracious: he enters into covenants/promises with men, and he reveals himself to us in his names and by his works. This is progressive revelation.

He also reveals the gospel in the Old Testament. When we look through Christian glasses, we see it quite clearly in different

ways. First, we recognize that it was always God's plan to enlarge the church beyond the tents or dwellings of his son Shem (Abraham's family) to the dwellings of his son Japheth (the Gentiles). Second, although it may appear that Shem got all the good promises, in fact Japheth was included in them too. While Noah did not know the precise manner in which God would bring the prophecy to fulfillment, the Japhethites did actually conquer the Shemites. This happened in history when the Greeks and Romans took over Palestine. It also happened when Christians were engrafted into the tents of the Shemites (Israel; compare Rom. 11). Israel was the church in the Old Testament. They were blessed and saved not because Shem was a better son than Japheth, but because of God's sovereign plan. This was not an issue of sin. It was God's sovereign choice (compare Rom. 9).

We are all Japhethites living in the tents of Shem. Unless we have been born of Jewish parents, then this is true of us quite literally. Because of our sin we all deserve to be like Japheth, outside the good promises of God made to Shem.

At the same time, we are also Shemites calling the Japhethites to live in our tents, to live in the church of Jesus Christ, the place of blessing. We are to call the scattered people of the world to join our voices in the proclamation: "Blessed be the Lord, the God of Shem!" "Sing, burst into song and shout for joy — for your maker is your husband — the Lord Almighty is His name — the Holy one of Israel is your Redeemer; he is called the God of all the earth" (Isa. 54:1,5).

As inhabitants of the tents of Shem, the promise is true for us: "Though the mountains be shaken and the hills be removed, yet God's unfailing love for us will not be shaken nor his covenant of peace be removed, says the Lord, who has compassion on us."