



# International Bible Lessons Commentary

Uniform Sunday School Lessons Series

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## Genesis 8:20-22 & 9:8-17 New Revised Standard Version September 3, 2017

The [International Bible Lesson](#) (*Uniform Sunday School Lessons Series*) for **Sunday, September 3, 2017**, is from **Genesis 8:20-22 & 9:8-17**. **Questions for Discussion and Thinking Further** follow the verse-by-verse *International Bible Lesson Commentary*. **Study Hints for Discussion and Thinking Further** will help with class preparation and in conducting class discussion: these hints are available on the [International Bible Lessons Commentary](#) website along with the *International Bible Lesson* that you may want to read to your class as part of your Bible study. You can discuss each week's commentary and lesson at the [International Bible Lesson Forum](#).

**(Genesis 8:20) Then Noah built an altar to the LORD, and took of every clean animal and of every clean bird, and offered burnt offerings on the altar.**

After Noah, his family, and the animals landed on dry ground, Noah offered a sacrifice of thanksgiving to the LORD. This is the first time we learn of an altar being built to the LORD. At this time, anyone could offer a sacrifice to the LORD. Though the Bible does not tell us how Noah knew the difference between clean and unclean animals (as they would be later defined in the Law of Moses), the LORD had told him to save both clean and unclean animals in the ark. He might have learned the difference if the LORD explained it to him as the LORD brought the animals and birds to him when they entered the ark. Notice: God wanted to save both the clean and unclean animals, just as the LORD wants to save all people, clean and unclean, through faith in Jesus Christ. Knowing the difference, Noah sacrificed only clean animals and birds to the LORD. Noah gave the LORD the best he had to give.

**(Genesis 8:21) And when the LORD smelled the pleasing odor, the LORD said in his heart, "I will never again curse the ground because of humankind, for the inclination of the human heart is evil from youth; nor will I ever again destroy every living creature as I have done.**

God approved the inclination of Noah's heart when Noah thanked the LORD with a sacrifice. The "heart" is the inner being of God and the people God created, for God created us in His image. The "heart" includes the emotions, the understanding, and the will. The heart of the LORD was pleased and felt appreciation for the expression of thanksgiving that Noah offered Him; the LORD understood why Noah offered his sacrifice, and the LORD told Noah that he would never again curse the ground because of human beings. God also explained that the emotions, the understanding, and the will of people incline toward evil from childhood or youth. Before we come to faith in Jesus Christ and He fills us with the Holy Spirit, we are self-centered and incline toward selfishness and sinful emotions, thoughts, decisions, and deeds. Though people incline toward evil, God in His grace said He would never again destroy all living creatures as He had done, and God made a covenant with Noah (symbolized by the rainbow) to that effect. To save people and the world from their evil inclinations, God sent His Son, Jesus the Messiah, into the world.

**(Genesis 8:22) As long as the earth endures, seedtime and harvest, cold and heat, summer and winter, day and night, shall not cease."**

By grace, God spoke to Noah and assured people that the earth will continue to exist according to the laws of nature as long as the earth endures. We can depend on seasonal changes and the fact that we can plant seeds and gather a harvest to meet our needs. Furthermore, we will have daylight in which to work and nighttime in which to rest. God has assured us that He will meet our needs through the work we do in a dependable universe. We do not live in a universe of chance, but in God's creation with natural laws that enable us to do all we do from turning on a light to sending satellites into orbit.

**(Genesis 9:8) Then God said to Noah and to his sons with him,**

God saved eight people in Noah's ark; Noah, his wife, Noah's three sons and their wives. Jesus said that before He returned the days would be like the days of Noah before the great flood (Matthew 24:36-39). God saved all of them, because "Noah was a righteous man, blameless in his generation; Noah walked with God" (Genesis 6:9). The Lord brought the flood, because "the wickedness of humankind was great in the earth, and every inclination of the thoughts of their hearts was only evil continually" (Genesis 6:5). The prospect of divine judgment remains for those who refuse to repent and choose to remain inclined toward evil.

**(Genesis 9:9) "As for me, I am establishing my covenant with you and your descendants after you,**

After the great flood, God gave the world a promise through Noah. His promise was made in the form of a covenant or official agreement regarding what God would do in the future. The promise was unconditional or without conditions that anyone had to fulfill except God himself. The unconditional covenant meant that no matter what happened on earth in the future and no matter what people did, God would not break or violate the promise and covenant that He made with Noah and every living being. The covenant was an everlasting covenant.

**(Genesis 9:10) and with every living creature that is with you, the birds, the domestic animals, and every animal of the earth with you, as many as came out of the ark.**

Because God made humankind in His image, God spoke to Noah rationally and made a covenant and promise the people could understand. The promise included all living beings and God named specifically the birds, domestic animals, and wild animals. Of course, the fish were not destroyed in the flood and are not included in the covenant. It was not necessary for God to include the fish.

**(Genesis 9:11) I establish my covenant with you, that never again shall all flesh be cut off by the waters of a flood, and never again shall there be a flood to destroy the earth.”**

God promised that never again would He flood the entire earth and destroy all living creatures by water. Of course, localized floods still occur, but never again would all living beings that live and breathe on the land be destroyed by floods. God did not say that He was no longer going to be the supreme King and Judge of the universe. He only eliminated a universal flood as a form of judgment and punishment for human sin and rebellion.

**(Genesis 9:12) God said, “This is the sign of the covenant that I make between me and you and every living creature that is with you, for all future generations:**

The sign of God’s covenant (that God made for and with every living creature forever) showed God would never use water again to cover all of the land on the earth as a form of judgment. The sign was similar to a signature on an official document with terms that specified the obligations of the person who signed the document. The sign of God’s covenant should remind every person that God will judge people for their wickedness; therefore, sinners should repent and turn from wickedness if they are not living as Noah lived before the great flood. Peter wrote that a final future judgment of God would come, and it would come with fire instead of water (see 2 Peter 3:1-7).

**(Genesis 9:13) I have set my bow in the clouds, and it shall be a sign of the covenant between me and the earth.**

God's bow might be thought of as a warrior's bow that God put in the sky to never use again. Or, the sky might be thought of as a giant document or contract that God has signed with a rainbow, which can be seen by people around the world after a rain. God did not mean that He would not use other ways than water to judge people, discipline people, or punish people who persisted in doing evil. God would fight for and defend His people in the future, as the history of the Hebrew people demonstrates. Perhaps the bow could be seen as a beautiful monument or sculpture that would remind people of a past event and the promise of God for the future. There might have been rainbows prior to the great flood; if so, God gave new meaning to the rainbow and it serves now as an expression of the undeserved favor or grace of God.

**(Genesis 9:14) When I bring clouds over the earth and the bow is seen in the clouds,**

The monument God gave meaning to was the rainbow that could appear and be seen anywhere on earth where clouds could be seen and rain or snow could fall in the light of the sun. No one needs to fear that a flood will destroy the entire human race. God did not promise to protect every local area and every person from a local flood, because local floods have killed thousands since Noah's time.

**(Genesis 9:15) I will remember my covenant that is between me and you and every living creature of all flesh; and the waters shall never again become a flood to destroy all flesh.**

Of course, God did not need to see the rainbow to remind Him of a covenant or promise that He had made. Rather, God promised and gave the rainbow so whenever it rained or snowed people could remind themselves that God had made a promise that He could and would never forget to keep.

**(Genesis 9:16) When the bow is in the clouds, I will see it and remember the everlasting covenant between God and every living creature of all flesh that is on the earth.”**

Essentially, God said the same things at least two or three times to emphasize that He would keep His covenant with Noah and all living creatures. God only needs to make a promise or covenant once to mean what He says, but sometimes (if not often), people need to hear some things repeated several times in order to believe and remember. Noah and his family had experienced and witnessed the destruction by flood of every

living person but themselves, and every living land animal and bird except those on the ark. They needed to hear God's reassuring words of promise repeated more than once in order to overcome their traumatic experience and feel reassured when it rained again in the future. God did not and has not ceased to be the Supreme Lord over all the earth. God still enforces His just government, but in different ways; for example, later as judgment and to prevent the increase of evil at that time God confused people's language at the Tower of Babel.

**(Genesis 9:17) God said to Noah, "This is the sign of the covenant that I have established between me and all flesh that is on the earth."**

We do not know the exact date of the great flood, but we do know that God has kept His covenant or solemn promise to all flesh that is on the earth since the flood. We do know that events today and the actions of people today are similar to the days of Noah and similar to the days that Jesus described. We do know that among the true followers of Jesus Christ people live godly in Christ Jesus. We also see some who appear to live with only evil thoughts continually, just as in the days of Noah. We do know that Jesus has promised to come again, and He will justly judge and restore the earth through fire.

### **Questions for Discussion and Thinking Further**

1. Why did God send the great flood upon the earth? Why did God save Noah and his family?
2. Do human beings need to do anything or stop doing something for God to keep His promise never to send a great flood again over all the earth?
3. Did God say that He would never judge or destroy the earth again as a just judgment for human evil and rebellion?
4. Why did God say that when He saw the rainbow that He would remember His covenant and promise?
5. Why do you think God emphasized repeatedly that when He saw the rainbow that He would remember His promise and covenant?

Begin or close your class by reading the short weekly *International Bible Lesson*.

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