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Standard LESSON QUARTERLY®

EASY-TO-READ TYPE
NIV® BIBLE TEACHER

COVENANT WITH GOD
*PENTATEUCH; 1 & 2 SAMUEL;
NEHEMIAH; JEREMIAH; EZEKIEL;
1 CORINTHIANS; HEBREWS*

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September • October • November

COVENANT WITH GOD

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COVENANT WITH GOD

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QUARTERLY QUIZ

Use these questions as a pretest or as a review. The answers are on page iv of *This Quarter in the Word*.

Lesson 1

1. God affirmed to Noah that seedtime and _____ would never cease. *Genesis 8:22*
2. God told Noah of the need to destroy the earth a second time with water. T/F. *Genesis 9:11*

Lesson 2

1. Abraham was given his name because he would be _____ of many nations. *Genesis 17:5*
2. The covenant sign Abraham and his male descendants were to bear was _____. *Genesis 17:11*

Lesson 3

1. The penalty for working on the Sabbath was what? (death, 40 lashes, prison?) *Exodus 31:14, 15*
2. The Lord's words to be obeyed were written on two tablets of wood. T/F. *Exodus 31:18*

Lesson 4

1. God's rescue of his captive people was for the sake of God's holy _____. *Ezekiel 36:22*
2. God promised to give his people a new what? (pick two: land, heart, spirit, stone, name?) *Ezekiel 36:26*

Lesson 5

1. Abram's (Abraham's) belief was credited to him for _____. *Genesis 15:6*
2. Which people group is not mentioned as occupying the land promised to Abram's seed? (Moabites, Jebusites, Kenites?) *Genesis 15:18-21*

Lesson 6

1. The Lord's descent on Sinai was accompanied by what? (hail, wind, fire?) *Exodus 19:18*
2. Only Moses was allowed to approach God on Mount Sinai. T/F. *Exodus 19:24*

Lesson 7

1. Having the fear of God is a personal deterrent to _____. *Exodus 20:20*

2. At the heart of Israel's worship was to be an altar of what? (gold, silver, earth?) *Exodus 20:24*

Lesson 8

1. The Lord granted permission to David to build a "house" for God. T/F. *2 Samuel 7:5, 12, 13*
2. David's predecessor as king was who? (Saul, Samuel, Solomon?) *2 Samuel 7:15*

Lesson 9

1. The returned exiles traced their difficulties back to the time of the kings of which country? (Babylon, Assyria, Greece?) *Nehemiah 9:32*
2. The people's commitment to the law of God included a curse and an oath. T/F. *Nehemiah 10:29*

Lesson 10

1. God granted Phinehas, priest and grandson of Aaron, a covenant of _____. *Numbers 25:10-12*
2. God said that a different Phinehas would die on the same day as his brother. T/F. *1 Samuel 2:34*

Lesson 11

1. God revealed to Jeremiah that the new covenant would be made with the peoples of _____ and _____. *Jeremiah 31:31*
2. A key feature of the new covenant is that God forgives sin but does not forget it. T/F. *Jeremiah 31:34*

Lesson 12

1. The experience at Sinai was so intense that even Moses was fearful. T/F. *Hebrews 12:21*
2. The writer of Hebrews affirms that God is a consuming _____. *Hebrews 12:29*

Lesson 13

1. The two physical elements of the Lord's Supper are _____ and cup. *1 Corinthians 11:26-28*
2. Self-examination should precede observing the Lord's Supper. T/F. *1 Corinthians 11:27-29*

QUARTER AT A GLANCE

by Douglas Redford

THE CONCEPT of a covenant-making deity was virtually unknown to pagan religions of the ancient Near East (see *Get the Setting*, page 4). The impersonal nature of their fictitious gods contrasts starkly with the personal nature of the true God, the one who declares, “I have loved you with an everlasting love” (Jeremiah 31:3). He demonstrates that love through the covenants he makes with humanity.

Signs from God

A characteristic of God’s covenants is his provision of signs to accompany them. Such signs, or symbols, serve as reminders or visual aids. As such, they keep people aware of both their privileges and their responsibilities under the covenant at issue. This is necessary; for while God has a spotless record as a covenant keeper, humans are just as consistent in being covenant breakers. God knows all too well our tendency to forget or to be distracted from pursuing his desires for us.

The covenant signs highlighted in our first unit of study are the rainbow, circumcision, Sabbath observance, and the presence of the Spirit. The presence of the rainbow (lesson 1) and the Spirit (lesson 4) point to obligations God has placed on himself. On the other hand, the signs of circumcision (lesson 2) and observance of the Sabbath (lesson 3) point to obligations that God placed on humans. An interesting difference!

Servants of God

Our second unit of study highlights God’s partnership with the obedient. Under particular consideration in that regard are Abraham (lesson 5), Moses (lessons 6 and 7), and David (lesson 8). They are key figures in the history of Israel, history that included a return from exile that only God could have orchestrated (lesson 9).

Sometimes the making of a covenant is accompanied by non-enduring signs—visual aids

intended only for the original audience. For example, God’s covenant with Abraham featured a rather mysterious procedure in which God had him participate. This assured the patriarch that God would keep his promises.

Offering more examples are the two lessons concerning Moses as they note the sights and sounds of thunder, lightning, thick cloud, loud trumpet, smoke, fire, earthquake, thick darkness, and even the voice of God himself! All were meant to have a lasting impression on the Israelites in deterring sin (Exodus 20:20). But history reveals Israel’s failure in this regard, and the Jews of Nehemiah’s day had their personal experience of return from exile as a reminder to obey God.

Son of God

Our third unit of study touches on some distinctive qualities of the new covenant in Jesus. The prophet Jeremiah (lesson 11) foresaw this covenant as he looked ahead to God’s intentions to “remember their sins no more” (Jeremiah 31:34). The study from Hebrews 12 (lesson 12) notes how Jesus is the mediator of the new covenant. Fittingly, that lesson is followed by instructions on observing the Lord’s Supper. Christ instituted this

God has a spotless record as a covenant keeper.

visual aid as a way for us to remind ourselves of the basis of the new covenant under which we live.

When New Means Better

Personal experience teaches us that something advertised as new does not always mean it is better than what is being replaced. But Hebrews 8:6 is our assured reminder that the new covenant in Christ is infinitely better than the old. How privileged we are to live under the better!

GET THE SETTING

by Lloyd Pelfrey

BINDING AGREEMENTS, or covenants, were known and used in ancient times. A more familiar term today is *contracts*. We can hardly imagine how any society, ancient or modern, could function without them!

The Bible's first use of the word *covenant* is in Genesis 6:18 regarding Noah (compare 9:8-17, lesson 1). But a passage often overlooked concerning an even earlier covenant is Hosea 6:7. The majority interpretation affirms that not only had Israel ("they") broken covenants, Adam had done so as well—although the word *covenant* is not used in Genesis 1–3. (The Hebrew word *adam* can refer to the first human, to people in general [compare Job 31:33 on these two], or to a place [Joshua 3:16].)

If the very first human can be said to have been associated with a covenant, then it is reasonable to assume that covenants became widespread among humanity in general. Indeed, solid evidence exists to establish that this is the case. At least four types of covenants have been identified.

Parity Agreements

These occur when two or more individuals enter freely into a pact of some kind. Archaeologists have discovered an abundance of documentation, with records dated before the time of Abraham (2000 BC), describing business agreements, marriages, etc. The rituals varied. In one case, a clay tablet describes a ceremony in which a she-goat and a dog were brought as sacrificial animals. A participant insisted that he wanted a young donkey instead. That was done, and the covenant was established. The patriarchs Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob each entered into parity agreements (see Genesis 14:13; 26:28-31; 31:44, respectively).

Suzerain or Vassal Covenants

A king who conquered a nation was considered the suzerain (pronounced *soo-zer-in*), and the suzerain dictated terms to the vassal. The Hittites

of Asia Minor are given the credit for developing a suzerain covenant that was used as a model by many throughout the second millennium BC.

Some scholars have discerned that the outline of a Hittite suzerain treaty is used for the book of Deuteronomy and the last chapter of Joshua. This factor helps date the writing of these books.

A compilation from different treaty tablets demonstrates the parts of a suzerain document: a preamble with the name and titles of the suzerain, a prologue describing previous deeds, the actual terms for the parties, the deposit of the document in a specific place (often a temple), a listing of witnesses, and the curses or blessings on the parties of the covenant. The listing of witnesses often includes the names of gods and goddesses.

Divine Covenants

Deity is not merely a witness in this type of covenant; he establishes its terms. This is the type of covenant found most frequently in the Bible. It is virtually unknown in pagan religions, since their gods do not speak. We say "virtually" because scholars have found what appears to be a record of one such covenant: a clay tablet from about 680 BC. The tablet lists the pagan god Asshur promising future battle victories to King Esarhaddon of Assyria (mentioned in 2 Kings 19:37; Isaiah 37:38; and Ezra 4:2).

Covenant Renewals

Found only in the Bible, these feature rededication to an existing covenant. Joshua 24:25 summarizes one such.

Conclusion

In his wisdom, God stated his relationship with people through an instrument familiar to everyone: the covenant. The Son of God came to establish a new covenant so all peoples might have the opportunity to enter it—and to keep it.

Mon, Nov. 13 **God's Awesome Power** Psalm 66:1-4
 Tue, Nov. 14 **Covenant Blessings** Matthew 5:1-12
 Wed, Nov. 15 **Keep Your Covenant with God** Deuteronomy 4:21-24
 Thu, Nov. 16 **Praise God for Answered Prayer** Psalm 66:16-20
 Fri, Nov. 17 **Everlasting Single Sacrifice for Sin** Hebrews 10:11-18
 Sat, Nov. 18 **Mediator of the New Covenant** Hebrews 9:11-15
 Sun, Nov. 19 **Receiving the Unshakable Kingdom**
 Hebrews 12:14, 15, 18-29
 Mon, Nov. 20 **Christ: Creator, Savior, Peacemaker** Colossians 1:9-20
 Tue, Nov. 21 **Lord's Supper Correctives** 1 Corinthians 11:17-22
 Wed, Nov. 22 **Keeping the Faith Entrusted to You** Jude 1-4, 17-25
 Thu, Nov. 23 **Preparing to Share the Passover Meal** Mark 14:12-16
 Fri, Nov. 24 **Jesus Celebrates with Bread and Cup** Mark 14:22-25
 Sat, Nov. 25 **Participating in Spiritual Worship** Romans 12:1-8
 Sun, Nov. 26 **Observing the Lord's Supper** 1 Corinthians 11:23-34

THIS QUARTER IN THE WORD

Mon, Aug. 28 **Noah Found Favor with the Lord** Genesis 6:1-8
 Tue, Aug. 29 **People and Creatures Enter the Ark** Genesis 7:1-10
 Wed, Aug. 30 **People and Creatures Return to Earth** Genesis 8:13-19
 Thu, Aug. 31 **Be Fruitful, Multiply, Fill the Earth** Genesis 9:1-7
 Fri, Sep. 1 **Nobody Knows the Day and Hour** Matthew 24:36-44
 Sat, Sep. 2 **Under the Rainbow the Angel Speaks** Revelation 10:1-7
 Sun, Sep. 3 **The Bow, Sign of God's Promise** Genesis 8:20-22; 9:8-17

Mon, Sep. 4 **Sarai (Sarah), Mother of Nations** Genesis 17:15-17
 Tue, Sep. 5 **Ishmael, Father of a Nation** Genesis 17:20-22
 Wed, Sep. 6 **Abraham's Household Circumcised** Genesis 17:23-27
 Thu, Sep. 7 **Circumcision Event Remembered** Acts 7:1-8
 Fri, Sep. 8 **Promise Realized Through Faith** Romans 4:13-25
 Sat, Sep. 9 **Jesus, Mediator of Better Covenant** Hebrews 8:1-8
 Sun, Sep. 10 **Covenant with Abraham Reaffirmed** Genesis 17:1-14

Mon, Sep. 11 **The Sabbath Commandment** Exodus 20:8-11
 Tue, Sep. 12 **Recall God's Deliverance on the Sabbath**

Deuteronomy 5:12-15
 Matthew 12:9-14
 Wed, Sep. 13 **Healing on the Sabbath**
 Thu, Sep. 14 **Teaching on the Sabbath** Mark 6:1-5
 Fri, Sep. 15 **Worship on the Sabbath** Acts 16:11-15
 Sat, Sep. 16 **A Psalm for the Sabbath** Psalm 92
 Sun, Sep. 17 **The Sabbath, Sign of the Covenant** Exodus 31:12-18

Answers to the Quarterly Quiz on page 2

Lesson 1—1. harvest. 2. false. **Lesson 2**—1. father. 2. circumcision. **Lesson 3**—1. death. 2. false. **Lesson 4**—1. name. 2. heart, spirit. **Lesson 5**—1. righteousness. 2. Moabites. **Lesson 6**—1. fire. 2. false. **Lesson 7**—1. sin. 2. earth. **Lesson 8**—1. false. 2. Saul. **Lesson 9**—1. Assyria. 2. true. **Lesson 10**—1. peace. 2. true. **Lesson 11**—1. Israel, Judah. 2. false. **Lesson 12**—1. true. 2. fire. **Lesson 13**—1. bread. 2. true.

Mon, Sep. 18 **A New Covenant of the Heart** Jeremiah 31:31-34
 Tue, Sep. 19 **Nations Will Know the Lord** Ezekiel 36:33-38
 Wed, Sep. 20 **The Lord Will Restore Israel** Ezekiel 37:1-14
 Thu, Sep. 21 **Restored as One People** Ezekiel 37:15-23
 Fri, Sep. 22 **Making a Covenant of Peace** Ezekiel 37:24-28
 Sat, Sep. 23 **Profitable Actions for Everyone** Titus 3:8-11
 Sun, Sep. 24 **I Will Restore My Holy Name** Ezekiel 36:22-32

Mon, Sep. 25 **The Lord's Words Become Actions** Psalm 33:1-9
 Tue, Sep. 26 **Abram Called and Blessed** Genesis 12:1-3
 Wed, Sep. 27 **Promises of Land and Descendants** Genesis 13:14-17
 Thu, Sep. 28 **Angel Will Lead Conquest of Canaan** Exodus 23:23-27
 Fri, Sep. 29 **Promises Fulfilled** 1 Kings 4:20-25
 Sat, Sep. 30 **An Example of Righteous Faith** Romans 4:1-4
 Sun, Oct. 1 **God Covenants with Abram** Genesis 15:1-6, 17-21

Mon, Oct. 2 **You Are God's Choice** Deuteronomy 10:12-22
 Tue, Oct. 3 **Prepare to Meet Your God** Exodus 19:9b-15
 Wed, Oct. 4 **The Triumphant Glory of God** Isaiah 60:1-7
 Thu, Oct. 5 **House of Israel, Praise the Lord** Psalm 135:1-9, 19-21
 Fri, Oct. 6 **Revealed in a New Way** Luke 9:28-36
 Sat, Oct. 7 **A Chosen Race, a Holy People** 1 Peter 2:1-10
 Sun, Oct. 8 **Worship God Through Obedience** Exodus 19:16-25

Mon, Oct. 9 **People Hear God Speak the Commandments**
 Deuteronomy 5:22-27
 Tue, Oct. 10 **God's Exclusive Claim** Exodus 20:1-12
 Wed, Oct. 11 **Guide for Human Relationships** Exodus 20:13-17
 Thu, Oct. 12 **The Law Finds Fulfillment in Jesus** Matthew 5:17-20
 Fri, Oct. 13 **Anger Leads to Murder** Matthew 5:21-26
 Sat, Oct. 14 **Lust Leads to Adultery** Matthew 5:27-32
 Sun, Oct. 15 **People Hear God's Word from Moses** Exodus 20:18-26

Mon, Oct. 16 **Samuel Anoints David King** 1 Samuel 16:1, 11-13
 Tue, Oct. 17 **God to Build David's House** 1 Chronicles 17:9-15
 Wed, Oct. 18 **Resources to Build the Temple** 1 Chronicles 22:2-5
 Thu, Oct. 19 **David Instructs Solomon** 1 Chronicles 22:6-16
 Fri, Oct. 20 **Extolling the Majesty of the Lord** Psalm 89:1-15
 Sat, Oct. 21 **David, Prepared for Service** 1 Samuel 16:19-23
 Sun, Oct. 22 **Covenant with David** 2 Samuel 7:1-6, 8-10, 12-16

Mon, Oct. 23 **Israel's National Confession** Nehemiah 9:1-5a
 Tue, Oct. 24 **God's Creator and Covenant Maker** Nehemiah 9:5b-8
 Wed, Oct. 25 **God's Steadfast Love** Nehemiah 9:26-31
 Thu, Oct. 26 **Redeemer of Israel's Iniquities** Psalm 130
 Fri, Oct. 27 **Forgive Fellow Believers Repeatedly** Luke 17:1-4
 Sat, Oct. 28 **God's Kindness Leads to Repentance** Romans 2:1-8
 Sun, Oct. 29 **Covenant Renewal** Nehemiah 9:32-38; 10:28; 29

Mon, Oct. 30 **God Is Always Faithful** Psalm 44:1-8
 Tue, Oct. 31 **Performing a Good Service to Jesus** Matthew 26:6-13
 Wed, Nov. 1 **Serve the Lord and One Another** Romans 12:9-18
 Thu, Nov. 2 **Called to Mission Service** Philimon 8-16
 Fri, Nov. 3 **Tragic Result of Baal Worship** Numbers 25:1-9
 Sat, Nov. 4 **Treating Offerings with Contempt** 1 Samuel 2:12-17
 Sun, Nov. 5 **Covenant of Priesthood** Numbers 25:10-13; 1 Samuel 2:30-36

Mon, Nov. 6 **God's Love Unites People** Jeremiah 31:1-6
 Tue, Nov. 7 **People with Disabilities Welcome** Jeremiah 31:7-9
 Wed, Nov. 8 **Celebration of Homecoming** Jeremiah 31:10-14
 Thu, Nov. 9 **Rachel's Children to Return** Jeremiah 31:15-20
 Fri, Nov. 10 **Covenant Relationship Restored** Hosea 2:16-20
 Sat, Nov. 11 **In Remembrance of Me** Luke 22:14-20
 Sun, Nov. 12 **New Covenant Accountability** Jeremiah 31:27-34

LESSON CYCLE CHART

International Sunday School Lesson Cycle, September 2016–August 2022

Year	Fall Quarter (Sep, Oct, Nov)	Winter Quarter (Dec, Jan, Feb)	Spring Quarter (Mar, Apr, May)	Summer Quarter (Jun, Jul, Aug)
2016–2017	The Sovereignty of God (Isaiah, Matthew, Hebrews, Revelation)	Creation: A Divine Cycle (Psalms, Luke, Galatians)	God Loves Us (Psalms, Joel, Jonah, John, Romans, Ephesians, 1 Peter, 1 John)	God's Urgent Call (Exodus, Judges, Prophets, Acts)
2017–2018	Covenant with God (Pentateuch, 1 & 2 Samuel, Nehemiah, Jeremiah, Ezekiel, 1 Corinthians, Hebrews)	Faith in Action (Daniel, Matthew, Acts, Ephesians, 1 Timothy, James)	Acknowledging God (Pentateuch, 2 Chronicles, Psalms, Luke, John, 2 Corinthians, Hebrews, Revelation)	Justice in the New Testament (Matthew, Luke, Romans, 2 Corinthians, Colossians)
2018–2019	God's World and God's People (Genesis)	Our Love for God (Exodus, Deuteronomy, Joshua, Psalms, Matthew, Luke, Epistles)	Discipleship and Mission (Matthew, Luke, Acts, Romans)	Covenant in God (Ruth, 1 Samuel, Matthew, Mark, Ephesians, Colossians, Hebrews)
2019–2020	Responding to God's Grace (Pentateuch, 1 Samuel, 1 Kings, Luke, Epistles)	Honoring God (1 Kings, 1 Chronicles, Matthew, Luke)	Justice and the Prophets (Esther, Prophets, 1 Corinthians)	Many Faces of Wisdom (Proverbs, Ecclesiastes, Gospels, James)
2020–2021	Love for One Another (Genesis, 1 Samuel, Luke, John, Acts, Epistles)	Call in the New Testament (Isaiah, Gospels, Acts, Romans, 1 Corinthians, Hebrews)	Prophets Faithful to God's Covenant (Exodus, Joshua, 1 & 2 Kings, Ezra, Nehemiah, Lamentations, Prophets)	Confident Hope (Leviticus, Matthew, Luke, Romans, 2 Corinthians, Hebrews, 1 John)
2021–2022	Celebrating God (Exodus, 2 Samuel, Psalms, Mark, Acts, Revelation)	Justice, Law, History (Pentateuch, 2 Samuel, Ezra, Job, Isaiah, Nahum)	God Frees and Redeems (Deuteronomy, Ezra, Matthew, John, Romans, Galatians)	Partners in a New Creation (Isaiah, John, Revelation)

God	Creation	Love	Call	Covenant	Faith	Worship	Justice
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OBJECTS OR PARTNERS?

Teacher Tips by Jon Weatherly

ITAUGHT WELL; they learned poorly.” As a teacher of the Bible, I have wanted to use that excuse. I have worked to be well prepared and to have thoughtful learning objectives and engaging lesson plans. So how do I respond when things do not go well? Blame the students!

New Outlook

Lately I have revised my view. In the past I thought of class members as the objects of my teaching, those who received what I gave. Now I try to think of them as partners in the quest to know God and his Word.

As objects, class members are the things moved by my efforts. I stimulate their interest. I deliver content to their minds. I touch sensitive places in their hearts. I induce them to follow the path that I have laid out. Sometimes I get that just right. Sometimes I fail. It’s up to me.

But partners are different. Partners participate as equals. Every partner contributes. In a teaching/learning partnership, everyone is teaching and everyone is learning in a committed, long-term relationship. Teaching partners rather than teaching objects makes me acknowledge this unchanging truth: *each individual brings a distinct perspective.*

New Approach

As a teacher of objects, I aim the lesson at class members, with their differences, as best I can. As a teacher of partners, I rely on those differences to help everyone understand aspects of truth that we would otherwise miss. I remain the senior partner: I take responsibility to lead the conversation and assure full engagement. But I approach the class expecting everyone to contribute uniquely.

Differences of gender, ethnicity, education, culture, and economic class can either divide or enrich a group of people. As I think of my students as partners, I realize that their differences

are an asset. As a man, I hear other men’s perspectives on the Bible in ways that resonate with my own. But I need to hear women’s perspectives as they read the Bible, to balance and even correct mine. The same is true for me as a person with a graduate-school education, as I listen to people with different backgrounds and experiences.

Common Ground

Our common ground and irreducible standard is, of course, the sacred text of Scripture. The text means what the original writers intended it to mean, not what we want it to mean. The Bible challenges all of our experiences with its declaration of God’s truth. It corrects our faulty conclusions. But to do that, it needs to be heard for what it truly is. As we study the language, history, and literary art of the Bible, the clash of our differing perspectives helps us distinguish mere opinion from genuinely biblical teaching.

But what if the personal experiences of one of our class partners has resulted in a deeply flawed view of the biblical text? In a partnering classroom, truth is still truth. Within the errors of others may lie kernels of truth that can inform everyone in the partnership.

Imagine a class member who cannot affirm the Bible’s teaching that God is “Father.” Does that person have a troubled past with a human father? How can Scripture redirect that person to an important part of the human birthright? Can every class member learn from the conversation?

Better Together

Together we can contribute to a more mature understanding of the God of the Bible as we listen to and respect each other’s perspectives. Partnerships are not easy or tidy. But over time they can be powerful. See how your class performs differently when members become partners instead of objects!

THE RAINBOW

DEVOTIONAL READING: Isaiah 54:1-10
BACKGROUND SCRIPTURE: Genesis 8:20–9:17

GENESIS 8:20-22

²⁰ Then Noah built an altar to the LORD and, taking some of all the clean animals and clean birds, he sacrificed burnt offerings on it. ²¹ The LORD smelled the pleasing aroma and said in his heart: “Never again will I curse the ground because of humans, even though every inclination of the human heart is evil from childhood. And never again will I destroy all living creatures, as I have done.

²² “As long as the earth endures, seedtime and harvest, cold and heat, summer and winter, day and night will never cease.”

GENESIS 9:8-17

⁸ Then God said to Noah and to his sons with him: ⁹ “I now establish my covenant with you and with your descendants after you ¹⁰ and with every living creature that was with you—the birds, the livestock and all the wild animals, all those that came out of the ark with

you—every living creature on earth. ¹¹ I establish my covenant with you: Never again will all life be destroyed by the waters of a flood; never again will there 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 generations to come: ¹³ I have set my rainbow in the clouds, and it will be the sign of the covenant between me and the earth. ¹⁴ Whenever I bring clouds over the earth and the rainbow appears in the clouds, ¹⁵ I will remember my covenant between me and you and all living creatures of every kind. Never again will the waters become a flood to destroy all life. ¹⁶ Whenever the rainbow appears in the clouds, I will see it and remember the everlasting covenant between God and all living creatures of every kind on the earth.”

¹⁷ So God said to Noah, “This is the sign of the covenant I have established between me and all life on the earth.”

KEY VERSE

I establish my covenant with you: Never again will all life be destroyed by the waters of a flood; never again will there be a flood to destroy the earth. —Genesis 9:11

Unit 1: Signs of God's Covenants

LESSONS 1-4

LESSON AIMS

After participating in this lesson, each learner will be able to:

1. List elements of the covenant God made with Noah and all living creatures on the earth after the flood.
2. Compare and contrast the Noahic covenant with other covenants God made.
3. Write a statement of commitment to honor the covenant relationship he or she enjoys as a believer in Christ.

LESSON OUTLINE

Introduction

- A. It's a Sign!
 - B. Lesson Background
- I. Noah Worships (GENESIS 8:20-22)
 - A. First Altar (v. 20)
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Introduction

A. It's a Sign!

A quick glance at an object, image, or document can give us information in an instant. When we see a diamond on the ring finger of a woman's left hand, we immediately know that a proposal for marriage has been accepted. The presence of a license plate on an automobile indicates that the vehicle is allowed to operate on public roads. That framed diploma in our doctor's office assures us that he or she has completed a course of study in preparation for treating our ailments.

By these and many other visual devices we communicate. It should not surprise us, then, that God does the same. Today we will look at a sign from God that communicates not only an important promise but also a fact of history.

B. Lesson Background

The biblical account of the great flood is but one of at least five ancient flood stories. The existence of the latter leads some to believe that the biblical account used them as sources, and that the flood is a legendary myth of an ancient and ignorant people. But if there truly was a great flood in ancient times, then stories of the event would be passed down from generation to generation.

As people spread over the earth and formed distinct cultures, these stories would take on the characteristics of those cultures. It would be strange indeed if accounts of the actual great flood were absent altogether from ancient writings! So the existence of the nonbiblical stories actually serves to confirm that there was indeed a great flood at some point in history. The Bible's account of this flood is the accurate one. The Bible's unerring track record on other historical matters and the divine inspiration of Scripture (2 Timothy 3:16) assure us of this fact.

The biblical account of the great flood is detailed in giving specifics for the beginning of the flood, the length of time the rain fell, how long the floodwaters covered the earth, and how long it took for the waters to recede. The total amount of time adds up to a little more than a year (Genesis 7:11; 8:14).

I. Noah Worships

(GENESIS 8:20-22)

One can only imagine the joy and relief that Noah and his family experience on leaving the ark and stepping once again on solid ground. Noah's first act thereafter is to worship, to give thanks to the Lord for his providential care in bringing his family safely through this experience.

A. First Altar (v. 20)

20. Then Noah built an altar to the LORD and, taking some of all the clean animals and clean birds, he sacrificed burnt offerings on it.

This is the first altar mentioned in Scripture—though it is not the first blood sacrifice (see Genesis 4:4). When Noah was commanded to save pairs of animals in the ark, more clean animals were spared than unclean ones (Genesis 6:19, 20; 7:2, 3). Perhaps the act of sacrifice noted in the verse before us has been intended from the beginning, provision for it having been made by keeping more of the appropriate animals alive. We are not told what differentiates clean animals from unclean ones at this point in history, but Noah somehow knows the difference.

What Do You Think?

What are some ways to express thanks to God for a deliverance or other special blessing?

Talking Points for Your Discussion

- In acts of private worship
- In acts of corporate worship
- In acts of worship that witness to unbelievers
- Other

B. Final Curse (v. 21)

21. The LORD smelled the pleasing aroma and said in his heart: “Never again will I curse the ground because of humans, even though every inclination of the human heart is evil from childhood. And never again will I destroy all living creatures, as I have done.”

The writer (Moses) uses figurative language to describe God's response to the sacrifice. Since “God is spirit” (John 4:24), we need not assume

that God smells things the same way we do or has a literal, physical heart. Nevertheless, we understand such language. The same manner of figurative language is used when Scripture speaks of the “hand” and “arm” of the Lord (Deuteronomy 4:34; 5:15; 7:19; etc.). This kind of figurative language is known as *anthropomorphic*.

The point being made is that God accepts the offering. Moses will use the same kind of language later to describe the sacrifices and burnt offerings that the new nation of Israel will be commanded to present to the Lord (see Exodus 29:18, 25, 41; compare Philippians 4:18; contrast Leviticus 26:31; Amos 5:21).

But we may wonder to what end God accepts Noah's offerings. In later times, burnt offerings will atone for sin (Leviticus 1:1-9) and to ordain the Aaronic priesthood (Exodus 29). Some suggest that Noah's offerings are for atonement for the sins of all who perished in the flood, but that is not likely. Ordinarily an offering of atonement is made in lieu of punishment, but those who have perished have already been punished.

More likely, Noah's sacrifice is to purify the earth. Aaron and his sons will offer burnt offerings to purify themselves for the new priesthood centuries later; similarly, Noah offers sacrifices to cleanse the earth as home to new generations.

Up to this point in the Bible, the ground has been spoken of as being under a curse only twice. The ground was cursed in Genesis 3:17 because of sin. Only with difficulty would humanity be able to make a living from it (3:18, 19). Much later, Noah's father, Lamech, prophesied Noah to be the one to bring relief from the burdensome toil because of the ground “the Lord has cursed” (5:29). The question that arises, then, is whether the statement *never again will I curse the ground* here in 8:21 refers to the flood itself or to the original curse of 3:17. If the latter, then the prophecy of 5:29 is fulfilled—but then we have to ask why thorns and thistles still interfere (3:18) and why agriculture still involves sweat-producing labor (3:19). If the reference is to the punishment of the flood, then the promise to *never again . . . curse the ground* is another way of stating the promise never again to flood the earth (see 9:11, below).

The reason given, because *every inclination of the human heart is evil from childhood* fits better with the concept that the flood itself was the curse of the ground that will not be repeated. Time will reveal that the flood is not the permanent solution to sin, so repeating it will serve no purpose. The sacrifice of Christ will be needed to address the heart need and sin guilt of people.

C. Continual Seasons (v. 22)

22. “As long as the earth endures, seedtime and harvest, cold and heat, summer and winter, day and night will never cease.”

Days and years and seasons come about by the rotation of the earth and the tilt of its axis as the planet moves around the sun. These are constant and unchanging. But sometimes weather can block awareness of those constants. In a strong storm, the sun can be obscured to such an extent that daytime seems like night. One can imagine that the 40 days of rain Noah experienced were difficult to count. The cloud cover needed to produce such rain probably blocked sunlight almost totally during much of that time.

In addition, the months that passed with water high enough to cover the mountains (Genesis 7:20, 24) surely resulted in climate change. Evaporation of the floodwaters would have caused significant cloud cover once again. The earth would have cooled during this time. Perhaps Noah and his family were able to discern a significant change in climate by the end of their time on the ark. This could have caused concern about where such climate change would lead.

This promise in the verse before us allays any such fears. Even when storms are strong enough to obscure the sun for a time, *day and night will never cease*. Climate change may occur, but there will still be *summer and winter*. In one area the

winter may bring snow, but in others the winter is more of a rainy season. Still the seasons change with regularity as the earth continues on its course around the sun.

Even so, the Lord does allow for cataclysmic change—even outright destruction. The constant change of seasons that allows *seedtime and harvest* will continue only as long as the earth itself does so. Peter refers to the Noachic flood as an illustration that God is able to judge the world and that there is coming another destruction, one by fire (2 Peter 3:6, 7). But until that time of judgment, the cycles of the seasons will continue. Perhaps we should spend more time warning of the coming judgment because of sin rather than worrying about predictions of climate change because of carbon dioxide in the atmosphere!

What Do You Think?

How can we use Genesis 8:22 to comfort someone after a disastrous weather event?

Talking Points for Your Discussion

- Considering the person's familiarity with and/or acceptance of Scripture
- Regarding the danger of trivializing a situation
- Other

II. God Promises

(GENESIS 9:8-11)

Genesis 9:1-7 (not in today's text) begins with God's instruction for Noah and his family to increase the population. Humanity is to multiply anew over the face of the earth. Hand in hand with this instruction is a covenant that God expresses between himself and the earth.

A. Covenant Participants (vv. 8-10)

8, 9. Then God said to Noah and to his sons with him: “I now establish my covenant with you and with your descendants after you

This is the fifth time the biblical record reports on God's speaking to Noah. God spoke to him alone on the first three occasions (Genesis 6:13; 7:1; 8:15). Beginning at 9:1, Noah's sons are addressed as well. There is no explanation for the change, and it would be reading too much into

HOW TO SAY IT

Aaronic	Air-ahn-ik.
anthropomorphic	an-thruh-puh-more-fik.
Lamech	Lay-mek.
Noah	No-uh.
Noachic	No-ay-ik.

the text to suggest the sons were not true believers before the flood and only afterward were proper candidates for inclusion in the covenant.

Even before the flood, God indicated his intent to make the covenant that is now under discussion (Genesis 6:18). All those who came through the flood, as well as their descendants (*your descendants after you*), are included. Therefore all people for all time who live after the flood are part of the covenant.

What Do You Think?

How can the fact that we are included in a covenant God made first with Noah encourage us?

Talking Points for Your Discussion

- When we are spiritually or emotionally “down”
- When we are spiritually or emotionally “up”

10. “and with every living creature that was with you—the birds, the livestock and all the wild animals, all those that came out of the ark with you—every living creature on earth.”

The covenant includes animals as well. This is not to be understood that animals have equal value in God’s sight. Jesus specifically rejects that notion (Matthew 10:31; Luke 12:7). The fact that animals are permitted as food for humans (Genesis 9:3) further reinforces that humans are of greater value than animals.

Even so, *every living creature* shares in the covenant. They have their place in God’s creation, and even those permitted as food are not to be eaten with their blood still in them, which is their life (Genesis 9:4). Animal life has value and is entitled to a certain measure of respect. Human superiority is not a license to abuse animals (see Proverbs 12:10).

B. Covenant Promises (v. 11)

11a. “I establish my covenant with you: Never again will all life be destroyed by the waters of a flood;

As important as what the covenant promises is what it does not promise. It does not promise there will never be another flood of any magnitude, nor does it promise that there will never again be loss of life by means of flooding. Floods have occurred

many times since the days of Noah. The covenant promises instead not to repeat a flood like the one just experienced. From now on, floods will never be so severe as to leave only eight survivors (1 Peter 3:20).

11b. “never again will there be a flood to destroy the earth.”

The second part of the covenant promise reinforces the first part. Any understanding of the Noahic flood to have been merely localized must deal with this promise. If the promise is never to repeat a local flood, then the promise cannot be believed because there have been many local floods since the promise was given.

What Do You Think?

How would you respond to someone who says that floods today prove that God has not kept his promise?

Talking Points for Your Discussion

- Answering a new believer who is uncertain about the authority of Scripture
- Answering an unbeliever who is seeking answers sincerely
- Answering a hardened atheist

◆ *ON BEING “UNDER WATER”* ◆

The Great Recession of the first decade of this century found many homeowners “under water.” That terminology describes a situation in which a homeowner owes more money on the property than its market value. Much of the problem was traceable to a large increase in the issuance of so-called subprime mortgages; these were mortgages issued to people who wouldn’t have qualified under traditional lending guidelines. When the economic climate worsened and such mortgages couldn’t be paid due to job losses, one result in the ensuing chain reaction was massive declines in property values.

Governmental agencies responded with laws and regulations designed to prevent recurrence of such a crisis. Whether these efforts will be successful, who knows? On the other hand, God’s promise never again to destroy the earth by flood is 100 percent certain. The God who makes the promise to all



Visual for Lesson 1. *Start a discussion by pointing to this visual as you ask, “In what ways have you found this statement to be true in your own life?”*

humanity also wants to help us personally. We all end up “under water” in various ways at various times—sometimes due to our own foolishness or sin, sometimes through no fault of our own. Either way, the solution begins with looking to the God who restores. No matter how far “under water” our lives seem to be, he stands ready to help. Think of how much he already has done so by giving his Son to die for our sins! —C. R. B.

III. Bow Confirms

(GENESIS 9:12-17)

Promises backed with a confirmation are especially powerful. An example from real estate transactions is *earnest money*. This is a deposit that confirms a buyer’s intent to follow through on an offer to purchase (compare 2 Corinthians 5:5; Ephesians 1:14). The confirmation of God’s promise in today’s text is of a different kind but no less strong.

A. Symbol (vv. 12, 13)

12, 13. 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 generations to come: I have set my rainbow in the clouds, and it will be the sign of the covenant between me and the earth.”

God offers the rainbow as the visual symbol (*sign*) that guarantees he will keep his promise.

Some Bible students believe that this is the first appearance of a rainbow ever; others believe that God simply adds significance to the phenomenon that already exists.

The word used to refer to the rainbow here is the same word in both English and Hebrew as the bow that is a weapon of war (examples: Genesis 48:22; 1 Samuel 18:4). This overlap may simply be a reference to the shape they have in common, the long arc typifying both the rainbow and the archer’s bow. Some suggest a greater significance in proposing that God is laying aside his bow (weapon) and will not again exercise the kind of wrath the world has just experienced.

B. Significance (vv. 14, 15)

14. “Whenever I bring clouds over the earth and the rainbow appears in the clouds,

The rainbow’s spectrum of color is created as sunlight passes through atmospheric moisture. We generally do not see a rainbow during a storm, when sunlight is blocked by clouds. So this symbol of the covenant is not seen each and every time there are rain clouds *over the earth*, but when the sunlight is not obscured by clouds.

What Do You Think?

How does knowing the science of a rainbow affect your appreciation of it as a covenant symbol from God?

Talking Points for Your Discussion

- What it suggests about divine and human knowledge
- What it suggests about why God uses symbols in the first place
- Other

15. “I will remember my covenant between me and you and all living creatures of every kind. Never again will the waters become a flood to destroy all life.”

Note that the Lord does not say we should see the rainbow and remember his covenant; rather, he says *I will remember my covenant*. We may find it odd that the all-knowing God needs to be reminded of anything. Once again the text uses figurative language. While we need reminders,

God does not; but we understand that a reminder is assurance that something important will not be forgotten. God is giving assurance that he will not forget or forsake his covenant. And in that regard the rainbow is a symbol for us as well.

C. Summary (vv. 16, 17)

16, 17. “Whenever the rainbow appears in the clouds, I will see it and remember the everlasting covenant between God and all living creatures of every kind on the earth.” So God said to Noah, “This is the sign of the covenant I have established between me and all life on the earth.”

These two verses essentially repeat what has already been said. In so doing, they summarize the covenant. The phrase *everlasting covenant* repeats a concept from verse 12, where God says this covenant is “for all generations to come.” But neither the word *everlasting* nor the phrase *all generations* should be taken to mean that the covenant extends into eternity. The time limitation of Genesis 8:22 is that the covenant is in force “as long as the earth endures.”

That observation is not to be taken as a warning of possible flooding in our eternal abode! Rather, it sheds light on the significance of the word *everlasting* as it is occurs in other contexts regarding God’s covenants (examples: Genesis 17:13, 19; Leviticus 24:8; 2 Samuel 23:5; 1 Chronicles 16:17).

◆ PREPAREDNESS ◆

One of the most famous photos of a rainbow is that of nature photographer Galen Rowell (1940–2002). His photo shows a rainbow with one end appearing to rest on a palace in Tibet. When Rowell first saw the rainbow, it wasn’t near the palace. But his artistic sense could “see” that it could be. So he ran more than a mile to get the building and rainbow lined up properly. His physical and aesthetic preparedness resulted in an artistic triumph.

We recall that “faith is confidence in what we hope for and assurance about what we do not see” (Hebrews 11:1). In that regard, “by faith Noah . . . became heir of the righteousness that is in keeping with faith” (11:7). He did not need to foresee a covenant that would result in being symbolized by a

rainbow. What Noah needed—and had—was prepared faith. It was a faith that trusted God. It was a faith that led Noah to obedient action. The blessing signified by the rainbow resulted.

For Noah, it was all about preparedness. Building the ark was vital, of course. But the basis of God’s choosing him to do so was spiritual in nature (Genesis 6:9). And so it is with us. If we do not sense God’s calling for a task, perhaps the issue is our own spiritual unpreparedness to receive such a calling. —C. R. B.

Conclusion

A. I Promise

Being something of a grammar purist, I chafe when I hear people say “I promise” when they really mean “I assure you.” Sometimes the two are interchangeable, but sometimes they are not. An example of the latter is when someone says “I promise you, I was not the one who did that.” A promise always looks to the future. I can make assurances about the past, but I can promise only for the future, as in “I promise I will never do such a thing again!” God promised that “never again will the waters become a flood to destroy all life” (Genesis 9:15). The rainbow assures us that he will keep his promise.

B. Prayer

Father, as the rainbow comforts us with your promise never again to destroy the earth by flood, may we also be moved to action by the coming destruction by fire. Empower us to share Jesus as the way of escape. We pray in his name. Amen.

C. Thought to Remember

Nothing is more certain than a promise from the God who cannot lie!

VISUALS FOR THESE LESSONS

The visual pictured in each lesson (example: page 14) is a small reproduction of a large, full-color poster included in the *Adult Resources* packet for the Fall Quarter. That packet also contains the very useful *Presentation Tools* CD for teacher use. Order No. 1629117 from your supplier.

INVOLVEMENT LEARNING

Enhance your lesson with NIV® Bible Student (from your curriculum supplier) and the reproducible activity page (at www.standardlesson.com or in the back of the NIV® Standard Lesson Commentary Deluxe Edition).

Into the Lesson

Before class, write each of the following words or phrases on separate index cards. (Each word or phrase is followed by a suggested gesture that you will not write on the card.)

It's OK (touching thumb with forefinger)

Come here (flexing pointing forefinger)

Great job (fist bump or high five)

Be quiet (forefinger to lips)

Good-bye (wave hand)

Get out (extended arm and forefinger or pointing thumb over shoulder)

I didn't like it (thumb pointed down)

Peace (forming a V with index and middle fingers)

It's a deal (handshake)

Start class by having a class member take an index card and communicate the word or phrase with a simple gesture. The class members who will make the *great job* and *it's a deal* gestures will need to do so with another person.

Alternative. Distribute copies of the “Sign Scramble” activity from the reproducible page, which you can download. Have students work individually or in pairs.

After either activity, lead into Bible study by saying, “We use different symbols, gestures, and signs to communicate without words. Today we will look at a sign from God that communicates an important promise.”

Into the Word

Divide your class into three groups, giving each one paper and pens. Each group should be assigned a section of the lesson text. Each group should try to summarize the lesson text with a couplet, two rhyming lines of poetry.

Scripture assignments and sample couplets follow:

Group 1—Never Again (Genesis 8:20-22)

Though humankind is prone to sin,

God won't destroy all life again.

Group 2—I Establish (Genesis 9:8-11)

God's solemn promise has been made

From Noah's time up till this day.

Group 3—My Token (Genesis 9:12-17)

When seeing a rainbow, everyone should

Remember that God's promise is good.

Allow time for groups to share their couplets and summarize their Scripture assignments.

Option. Write both the Scripture assignments and the sample couplets on the board. Read each section of the text together as a class. Then discuss the content of each section, referring to the couplet and to the commentary.

Into Life

On the top of the board or on two large posters, write these two headings: *Ways I Show Dependence on God's Promises* and *Ways I Show I Doubt God's Promises*. Take time to brainstorm items to add under either heading. Sample ideas follow:

Dependence: prayer, regular church attendance, personal devotional Bible reading, participation in a small group, a disciplined plan for giving to support the work of the church, volunteering for ministry such as a short-term mission trip, finding an accountability partner.

Doubt: workaholism, substance abuse, worry, fixation on entertainment and escapism, unhealthy focus on money and possessions, neglecting church attendance and prayer and Bible study, behaving differently around believers than around unbelievers, dishonesty

Alternative. Distribute copies of the “Prescribed Promises” activity from the reproducible page. Have students choose the need they have today and memorize the corresponding prescribed promise from the Bible this week.

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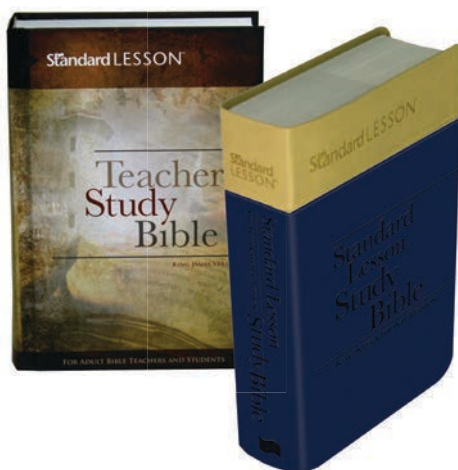
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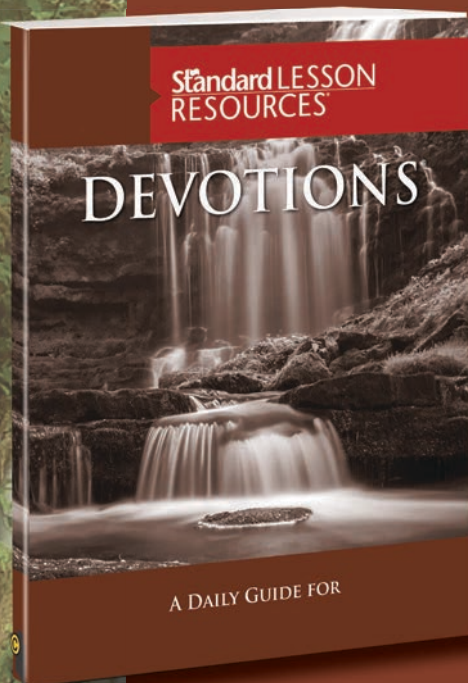
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