



NOAH ONE FAMILY SYMBOL: RAINBOW



UNDERSTANDING

(for your preparation as a leader)

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DISCUSSION

(to use with your group)

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Goal: That through God's covenant with Noah, all participants would understand that God is faithful, even when we are not.

UNDERSTANDING

WHAT DO I NEED TO KNOW ABOUT THIS PASSAGE?

Read Genesis 6:11–18, 9:18–28, 9:13–17

CONTEXT

Context in the Story of Salvation: The Growth of Sin

The effects of Adam and Eve’s rebellion against God are swift and dramatic. Shortly after their exile from Eden, we already find violence within their family: Their son, Cain, murders his brother, Abel.

After Cain’s violent crime, he is sent into further exile. God curses Cain’s line of descendants. The future generations of his descendants become known for their crimes, violence and sexual sins, while Seth’s descendants follow the law of the Lord and remain separated from Cain’s line. Before long, however, according to one interpretation, the two lines begin intermarrying, infecting Seth’s descendants with the sins and behaviors of Cain’s line. Finally, God looks upon His creation — and where He once “saw that it was good,” He now sees only worldwide wickedness.

Context for Our Story Today: God’s Covenant with Noah

Genesis 6:11–18

In looking down upon the earth, God finds only one righteous man: Noah (Gn 6:8). God reveals to Noah His dramatic plan: He is going to destroy the corrupted earth for the sake of a cosmic restoration. He asks Noah to build an ark (Gn 7:1 – 5), which will save innocent life — and He promises that, after the flood, He will establish a new covenant with Noah that will extend to his whole family. Through Noah's family, the entire human family is to be restored.

The terrible flood comes, but in the midst of the storm, Scripture says, “God remembered Noah” (Gn 8:1). He remembered the promise He made to Noah before the flood: that He would spare him and re-establish His covenant through his family, bringing life back into the world. For the next 150 days, the waters recede. Finally, nearly a full year later, Noah and his family are able to leave the ark, through which God had delivered them from destruction — because God is faithful to His promises.

In the wake of the flood's destruction, we see a kind of re-creation, a new creation, paralleling the old. The first covenant was made with Adam and Eve, a married couple. This new covenant expands beyond a couple to an entire family: Noah and his wife, their sons and their sons' wives.

Through this family, God gives humanity a second chance. But then, immediately afterward, another attack ensues.

CLIMAX: HAM'S REBELLION

Genesis 9:18–28

Soon after Noah and his family depart the ark and step into the new creation, Noah gets drunk in his vineyard and passes out, leaving his wife vulnerable to attack.

The language used in Genesis is that Ham, Noah's youngest son, "saw the nakedness of his father." The Book of Leviticus gives us an indication of what this might mean: "You shall not uncover the nakedness of your father's wife; it is your father's nakedness" (Lv 18:7 RSV [Revised Standard Version]). We can understand this verse even better when we read the same verse in the NAB (New American Bible) translation, which translates the Hebrew idiom about uncovering the nakedness of your father: "You shall not disgrace your father by having intercourse with your mother. She is your own mother; you shall not have intercourse with her" (Lv 18:7; see also Lv 20:11).

In other words, it was likely that Ham raped his mother while Noah was passed out, drunk. In ancient times, such a rape would have been a power play against the head of the family. We see a similar example of this with David and his son, Absalom, in Chapter 16 of the Second Book of Samuel. Absalom rebels against David — and in order to usurp his father's kingship, he sleeps with David's concubines in the sight of all Israel. In the same way, Ham's sin was an act of rebellion against his father and his older brother, Shem, the firstborn (and thus the recipient of their father's blessing).

When Noah awakens and realizes what has happened, he cannot curse Ham, because Ham has been blessed by God through the covenant. Instead, he curses "Canaan" — an interesting move, because Canaan is not born until later. It is possible, therefore, that Canaan — father of the Canaanites, Israel's enemy for generations to come — is the son of Noah's wife, and his conception was the result of Ham's incestuous rape.

This sin has disastrous consequences throughout the rest of the Old Testament, and it shows us that sin has consequences beyond ourselves. Even our "private" sins can have devastating effects on those around us. Like Adam in the garden, Noah, who should have

been guarding and protecting what was entrusted to him, instead allowed evil to take hold in his family.

APPLICATION: GOD'S FAITHFULNESS

Genesis 9:13–17

Even though the wickedness of human sin is present both before and after the flood, the Lord has proven Himself faithful. Upon bringing Noah's family forth from the ark, God establishes His covenant, as He promised, and seals it with the sign of the rainbow. Despite how quickly the human family falls back into sin, the rainbow is a reminder that God will never allow a flood to destroy the earth again. We are unfaithful, but He is faithful. When His bow appears in the sky, we can remember that He fulfills His promises to us as well.

It is fitting that this covenant extends to Noah's family. As we saw in the story of Ham, sin has particularly devastating effects upon the family — but God promises to be faithful, even in our families.

Interestingly, it always has to be raining to see a rainbow. In other words, it is when we are tested that we can become most aware of God's faithfulness. It is in the midst of life's storms that we are reminded of His promises. The seven colors of the rainbow also remind us of the Hebrew significance of the number seven and the sacredness of a newly formed covenant.

SUMMARY

In this chapter, we learned about the dramatic consequences of sin. But, God's covenant with Noah reminds us that, even in the midst of incredible wickedness, God is faithful to His promises. In our own lives, we can see the terrible effects sin has caused — maybe even particularly in our own family. Still, in the midst of our worst sins and the storms of life, God will be faithful, even when we are not. The symbol of the rainbow is a reminder that God will never abandon us.

DISCUSSION

DISCUSSION GUIDE FOR YOUR BIBLE STUDY

Genesis 6:11–18, 9:18–28, 9:13–17

Reminder to the leader of the goal of this chapter: That through God's covenant with Noah, all participants would understand that God is faithful, even when we are not.

OPENER:

1. Have you ever made a mistake and then wondered whether people would treat you differently afterward?

(Share aloud with your group.)

In the story of Noah, we are going to hear about how God is faithful, even when we are not.

2. But, before we look at Noah, let's see where we are in our story. What happened last time?

Allow the group to discuss. If they mention it, ask them who God made a covenant with and the symbol of the covenant (Adam, One Couple, the Sabbath).

CONTEXT: GOD'S COVENANT WITH NOAH

Read Genesis 6:11–18

3. There's a lot to observe in this passage. What's happened to the world since Adam and Eve and what does God tell Noah He's going to do?

Answer: Humanity has grown wicked. The first is that God tells Noah is that He's going to bring a flood upon the earth to destroy all He has made. The second is that God will establish a covenant with Noah, saving his family so that the human race can continue.

4. What do you think Noah must have been thinking when he heard the command to build an ark?

Allow the group to discuss.

5. Have you ever felt God asking you to do something that would require radical trust in His plan?

Allow the group to discuss.

CLIMAX: HAM'S REBELLION

Read Genesis 9:18–28

6. This sounds like a weird story. What do you think is going on in this passage?

Allow the group to discuss. (As the leader, don't reveal the answer yet.)

Note: For questions 7 and 8, be prepared with different translations of the Bible. You need both the RSV (Revised Standard Version) and the NAB (New American Bible). If you don't have a hard copy in your group, be prepared to look them up on a phone or computer.

7. In many ways, this passage doesn't seem to make sense. The passage says that Noah got drunk and that his son, Ham, saw his nakedness, told his brothers about it, and then his brothers

covered Noah with a blanket. When Noah wakes up, he curses Canaan, Ham's son, who isn't even born yet. Part of the problem in understanding this passage is the Hebrew idiom "uncovering the father's nakedness." This idiom hides the exact details of the story. Let's read Leviticus 18:7 to help us understand this passage, first in the Revised Standard Version (RSV) of the Bible. Did this help you understand the passage?

Allow the group to discuss.

8. Let's read Leviticus 18:7, the same verse we just read, but this time in the New American Bible (NAB), where the idiom is translated. In light of this verse, what did Ham do?

Answer: Ham slept with his mother while his father was passed out drunk, and then he went and bragged to his brothers about it.

9. Why do you think that Ham would do such a thing?

Answer: It was an opportunity for Ham to usurp power. By sleeping with his mother, Ham was proclaiming that he was the real master of the household. This was not an unheard-of power play in the ancient world. (For more, see 2 Sm 16:20 – 22.)

10. What do Ham's actions demonstrate about human sin and brokenness?

Answer: We have all been deeply affected by the fall of our first parents, Adam and Eve. We can see that our tendency toward wickedness will not be fixed by improving our external conditions. Only a divine remedy can change the human heart.

11. Ham's sin has destructive consequences: His line of descendants through his son Canaan (the Canaanites) will be a constant obstacle to Israel's faithfulness throughout the rest of the Old Testament. We can sometimes think that our "private" sins don't have far-reaching consequences. How do you think our sins affect the world around us? How would things be different if we didn't commit those sins?

Allow the group to discuss.

APPLICATION: GOD'S FAITHFULNESS

Read Genesis 9:13–17

12. The symbol of this covenant is the rainbow — a sign of God's faithfulness even amidst difficult moments. What are some ways you have seen God's faithfulness play out during the storms of your life?

Allow the group to discuss.

13. God makes His covenant with Noah within the context of his family. Similarly, God offers His covenant to us within the context of our (often broken and dysfunctional) families. It can be difficult to see how God is working within our families, but God will be faithful even when we are not. How can we grow in our trust of God's faithfulness, even amidst difficulties within our families?

Allow the group to discuss.

SUMMARY

(Share aloud with your group.)

In this chapter, we learned about the dramatic consequences of sin. But, God's covenant with Noah reminds us that, even in the midst of incredible wickedness, God is faithful to His promises. In our own lives, we can see the terrible effects sin has caused — maybe even particularly in our own family. Still, in the midst of our worst sins and the storms of life, God will be faithful, even when we are not. The symbol of the rainbow is a reminder that God will never abandon us.

Note: Has your group begun praying *Lectio Divina* with Scripture? Your group can either download the *Lectio Divina* guide online (<https://focusoncampus.org/content/the-story-of-salvation>) or sign up for the daily email (<https://focusoncampus.org/content/story-of-salvation-daily-lectio>).

