

# OpenTheo

## January 9th: Genesis 9 & John 5:1-24

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Reflections upon the readings from the ACNA Book of Common Prayer (<http://bcp2019.anglicanchurch.net/>).

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## Transcript

Genesis chapter 9. And God blessed Noah and his sons, and said to them, Be fruitful and multiply and fill the earth. The fear of you and the dread of you shall be upon every beast of the earth, and upon every bird of the heavens, upon everything that creeps on the ground, and all the fish of the sea. Into your hand they are delivered.

Every moving thing that lives shall be food for you. And as I gave you the green plants, I give you everything. But you shall not eat flesh with its life, that is, its blood.

And for your life-blood I will require a reckoning. From every beast I will require it, and from man. From his fellow man I will require a reckoning for the life of man.

Whoever sheds the blood of man, by man shall his blood be shed. For God made man in his own image. And you, be fruitful and multiply, increase greatly on the earth and multiply in it.

Then God said to Noah and to his sons with him, Behold, I establish my covenant with

you and your offspring after you, and with every living creature that is with you, the birds, the livestock, and every beast of the earth with you, as many as come out of the ark. It is for every beast of the earth. I establish my covenant with you that never again shall all flesh be cut off by the waters of the flood, and never again shall there be a flood to destroy the earth.

And 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. I have set my bow in the cloud, and it shall be a sign of the covenant between me and the earth. When I bring clouds over the earth and the bow is seen in the clouds, 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. When the bow is in the clouds, I shall see it and remember the everlasting covenant between God and every living creature of all flesh that is on the earth. 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.

The sons of Noah who went forth from the ark were Shem, Ham, and Japheth. Ham was the father of Canaan. These three were the sons of Noah, and from these the people of the whole earth were dispersed.

Noah began to be a man of the soil, and he planted a vineyard. He drank of the wine and became drunk, and lay uncovered in his tent. And Ham, the father of Canaan, saw the nakedness of his father and told his two brothers outside.

Then Shem and Japheth took a garment, laid it on both their shoulders, and walked backward and covered the nakedness of their father. Their faces were turned backward, and they did not see their father's nakedness. When Noah awoke from his wine and knew what his youngest son had done to him, he said, Cursed be Canaan! A servant of servants shall he be to his brothers.

He also said, Blessed be the Lord, the God of Shem, and let Canaan be his servant. May God enlarge Japheth, and let him dwell in the tents of Shem, and let Canaan be his servant. After the flood Noah lived 350 years.

All the days of Noah were 950 years, and he died. The story of the flood is a story of decreation and recreation. The original creation narrative is a story of a world formed out of water.

The earth is void and formless, darkness is over the face of the deep, the spirit of God is hovering over the face of the waters. And God separates the waters, the waters above from the waters beneath. He draws the land out of the waters and gradually forms a world out of the waters.

In the story of the flood we see the world restored to its original chaotic and void and

formless shape. The world is being broken down. The fountains of the deep are opened up, the heavens are opened up, and we see this division between the waters above and the waters beneath no longer existing.

The waters that were once separated have now been brought back together. In the story of chapter 8 and 9 of Genesis we see various allusions to this. We see allusions to the deep.

We see allusions to the wind on the surface of the waters. We see references to the land drying out. And all of these draw our attention back to Genesis chapter 1. And then the earth is populated.

First of all birds are sent out. Then we have the animals being sent out and man going out into the creation. And at the beginning of chapter 9 we see very similar statements to the ones that we find after the creation of man and the animals in chapter 1 of Genesis.

Be fruitful and multiply and fill the earth. But there's a change here. Man is now told that the fear of you and the dread of you will be upon every beast of the earth and upon every bird of the heavens, upon everything that creeps on the ground and all the fish of the sea.

They've been delivered into humanity's hands. Now many have seen in this and I think there's reason to believe this is the case, that at this point man is given the right to eat animals. And man did not eat animals beforehand.

Man was vegetarian. Man was existing within a garden setting originally and then out in the world in a weaker state. But now man has the power to rule over the world and with that greater power of rule and authority over the animals comes the right to eat animals.

As man is given the green plants at the very beginning so man is given animals to eat. But yet there is a taboo, a restriction and that is not to eat animals with their blood. In part this is an expression of the fact that the animals belong to God alone.

That when man eats animals we're not eating animals as those who have a natural right to take whatever life we want but as those who have received this right from God to whom all things belong. Who gives life and breath to all things and then gives the right to take certain life into our hands. There's a reckoning that will be required of us of the life that we take.

First of all we cannot take animal life and dispose of it however we will. The prohibition on eating blood expresses this. But there's also a judgement that comes upon those who take the life of man.

So we can take the life of other creatures but to take the life of man is to take the life of

one who has been created in the image of God. And God will hold such a person responsible. The judgement that's carried out upon the person who takes the life of another man is one that expresses on the one hand the dignity of every human being made in the image of God but also the dignity of human beings as those who share the dominion of God.

By man shall his blood be shed for God made man in his own image. In part that may be an expression of the fact that since God has made man in his own image man has the right to judge other men on account of their breaking of God's law, to act on God's behalf and to take the life of other human beings in these acts of judgement. We can think about the way in which in principle every judgement that we have whether that's taking a particular fine from someone or whether it's putting someone in prison for a number of years or whether it's even the death penalty, all of these arise from this fundamental principle that life can be taken by other men as an expression of the authority that God has given to his representatives, to his vicegerents.

Man is called to go out into the creation to be fruitful and multiply, to increase greatly upon the earth and multiply upon it. And God establishes a covenant with humanity at this point, with Noah and his descendants and with every living creature that is with them. And the covenant is that he will never again cut off flesh by the waters of the flood.

There will never be this de-creation event of the same type. This is accompanied by a sign which is the rainbow in the heavens and God promises on this account that he will not judge the earth in the same way again, that the judgement is finished, it's over. And as we think about the parallels between the original creation and the de-creation and re-creation of the world in the flood, this is a further connection, that the covenant and the sign of the covenant as the rainbow correspond with the day of the Sabbath.

It's God's rest, it's his blessing and it's his determination that the act is finished, that he's no longer going to judge in this particular way. God hangs up his war bow in the clouds. The act is finished and now human life can continue according to its regular patterns.

There's an everlasting covenant that's established in this way. Following the original creation story, there is a second account of God's forming of the man from the earth, the creation of a garden and all the events that occur within the garden, most particularly the fall. And we see a recapitulation of that pattern here.

Now the word for soil there is the same word as the Adamah from which Adam was formed. So Noah is playing out the Adam pattern here. He plants a vineyard just as God planted a garden in Eden.

He drinks of the wine and became drunk and lay uncovered in his tent. He takes of the fruit of the tree, he eats it, he has a change in his state and he's found naked. And so it's

the pattern of the fall playing out again.

And at this point the son Ham, the father of Canaan, sees the nakedness of his father and tells the two brothers. And then the brothers act in a righteous, honourable manner. They take in the garment from outside and they cover him up.

Now there are many questions about what this involves. What does it mean that he uncovers the nakedness of his father? In the book of Leviticus we see the sexual relation with the mother as being an act of uncovering the nakedness of the father. So some have suggested this is incest with the wife of Noah and that Canaan is the result of that illicit union.

Others have suggested it's an act of homosexual rape of the father. And both of those suggestions I think fail to reckon fully with the fact of the actions of Shem and Japheth. The way that they put the garment over their father.

That the key concern seems to be covering over the nakedness of the father. The point of Ham's action is to usurp his father's authority. Whatever is involved here, that seems to be what is at issue.

Shem and Japheth restore their father's dignity and ensure that they do not seek to attack or undermine his authority. Noah wakes, he realises what has been done to him and then he summons his sons and he judges them. He judges Ham's son in particular.

Cursed be Canaan, a servant of servants shall he be to his brothers. And here we should see a parallel with the judgement upon the serpent. Which suggests maybe that part of Ham's purpose was to subvert his father's authority by getting his brothers in.

To tempt them to act against the father's authority. Think back to the sin of the serpent in the Garden of Eden. The serpent tries to undermine the authority of the father.

He tries to declare the promise that Adam and Eve will become like gods, knowing good and evil. That God is holding this back against them and that they should join with him in his rebellion. And Ham's action seems to be quite similar.

He usurps authority and he seeks to get his brothers to turn against the father too. And as a judgement for his action, his son is reduced in status. And so his son becomes a servant of servant to his brothers.

Which is similar to the way that the serpent is judged from among the beasts. He's cursed above all the beasts. On the other hand, whereas we see judgements carried out upon the serpent, Adam and Eve in Genesis chapter 3. Here the two brothers Shem and Japheth resist the temptation.

They clothe their father's nakedness and here they are blessed. Blessed be the Lord, the

God of Shem, and let Canaan be his servant. May God enlarge Japheth and let him dwell in the tents of Shem and let Canaan be his servant.

And so they are given authority over the son of the figure who's associated with the serpent. So the seed of the serpent figure in this narrative is going to serve the righteous seed. Those who stand up for the father and for his honour.

After the flood Noah lives 350 years or 300 years and 50 years. All the days of Noah are 950 years and he died. I previously observed a parallel between the age of Noah after the flood and the dimensions of the ark.

So the ark is 300 cubits by 50 cubits. After the flood Noah lives 300 years and 50 years. So there's an ark type character to Noah himself.

Noah is the ark of humanity. He and his children within him are the ones that will be born through the flood. And it's because of his righteousness and the grace that he finds in the eyes of God that humanity is saved.

And the complete years of his life are 950 years. What we're seeing within this chapter then is a recapitulation first of all of the original creation. Then of the events of the garden and then of the judgment.

The fall and the curse upon the serpent. In this case there's a blessing upon the two people who resist the temptation. One question.

Noah is a new head of humanity. Adam was the original head of humanity. He's the one that was first created from whom all descended.

But Noah is a new Adam. He's one who's also a man of the soil. A man of the Adomar.

He's one who also is within a vineyard. And he plays out many of the similar patterns that we see in the story of Adam. He also in some sense rules over the animals.

But there seem to be forms of progression too. So the question that I want you to think about is the way or the ways in which Noah represents a movement beyond, a progression beyond or maturation beyond the figure of Adam. And what might be the significance to that development.

John chapter 5 verses 1 to 24. After this there was a feast of the Jews and Jesus went up to Jerusalem. Now there is in Jerusalem by the Sheep Gate a pool in Aramaic called Bethesda which has five roofed colonnades.

In these lay a multitude of invalids. Blind, lame and paralyzed. One man was there who had been an invalid for 38 years.

When Jesus saw him lying there and knew that he had already been there a long time he

said to him, Do you want to be healed? The sick man answered him, Sir I have no one to put me into the pool when the water is stirred up and while I am going another steps down before me. Jesus said to him, Get up, take up your bed and walk. And at once the man was healed and he took up his bed and walked.

Now that day was the Sabbath. So the Jews said to the man who had been healed, It is the Sabbath and it is not lawful for you to take up your bed. But he answered them, The man who healed me, that man said to me, take up your bed and walk.

They asked him, Who is the man who said to you, take up your bed and walk? Now the man who had been healed did not know who it was, for Jesus had withdrawn as there was a crowd in the place. Afterward Jesus found him in the temple and said to him, See, you are well. Sin no more that nothing worse may happen to you.

The man went away and told the Jews that it was Jesus who had healed him. And this was why the Jews were persecuting Jesus, because he was doing these things on the Sabbath. But Jesus answered them, My father is working until now and I am working.

This was why the Jews were seeking all the more to kill him, because not only was he breaking the Sabbath, he was even calling God his own father, making himself equal with God. So Jesus said to them, Truly, truly I say to you, the son can do nothing of his own accord, but only what he sees the father doing. For whatever the father does, that the son does likewise.

For the father loves the son and shows him all that he himself is doing, and greater works than these will he show him, so that you may marvel. For as the father raises the dead and gives them life, so also the son gives life to whom he will. For the father judges no one, but has given all judgment to the son.

That all may honour the son, just as they honour the father. Whoever does not honour the son, does not honour the father who sent him. Truly, truly I say to you, whoever hears my word and believes him who sent me, has eternal life.

He does not come into judgment, but has passed from death to life. In John 5, Jesus once again goes up to Jerusalem for a feast of the Jews. While at the feast, Jesus encounters an infirm man by the sheep gate near a pool.

While it is admitted in certain translations of the Bible, some translations refer to an angel that would come down, stir the waters and those who went in could be healed of their illnesses. So Jesus is coming to a situation where there is this man who's waiting for healing, who has been hoping for healing at this pool with some special powers, and yet has not received the healing that he's hoped for. No one is able to help him to get into the pool when the water is stirred, and as soon as he tries to get in, someone steps down before him.

And Jesus directly instructs him, get up, take up your bed and walk. Why might the pool be significant? Well, to this point in the Gospel of John, there have been several mentions of water and cleansing and other themes like that. In chapter 1, you have John's baptism.

In chapter 2, you have the water turned into wine from the waters of purification, the pots. And then in chapter 3, you have new birth of water and the spirit and John's baptism again. In chapter 4, you have Jesus and his disciples baptizing and then the meeting at the well and the offer of living waters.

And now in chapter 5, you have a healing pool. It seems that Jesus is the one who brings new waters, new waters to drink, new waters of cleansing, new waters of healing. The people are gathered near the sheep gate and they're waiting for this stirring of the waters.

And it might be akin to the wind of the spirit in Genesis chapter 1, verse 2, or the wind at the flood or the wind at the Red Sea. And the setting is an evocative one. If you think about it, there are infirm sheep at a pool struggling to get to the water so that they'll be healed and able to enter into the city.

Moses was the great shepherd of Israel. But Jesus is the one who comes to meet these people at the sheep gate, the sheep that need to be let in, that need to be healed. The man has had an infirmity for 38 years and this is an important number.

If we go back to Deuteronomy chapter 2, verse 14, we see that Israel wandered for 38 years after their failure to enter into the land. And the lameness of the man may have even entailed some degree of exclusion from the precincts of the temple, as we see in 2 Samuel chapter 5, verse 8. And the healing of the man is a sign of giving that languishing flock of God entrance into the promised land. Jesus is a new Joshua.

His name is the same name as Joshua. And he gives rest to the man who takes up his bed, his instrument of rest, on the Sabbath as a sign and later enters into the temple. Jesus is, on account of this, accused of breaking the Sabbath when actually he was fulfilling its meaning.

We need to consider when Jesus is performing these acts on the Sabbath, he's not merely thinking in terms of, oh, here's an exception to the rule. Rather, he's saying, this was the meaning of Sabbath all along, to give rest to man. And in this act of healing, I am giving rest to the man, fulfilling the meaning of Sabbath, not undermining it.

And so rather than seeing Jesus' teaching concerning the Sabbath as presenting us with a series of exceptions, the importance of the teaching on the Sabbath is that Jesus is revealing the primary intent of that commandment all the way along. Jesus' works are like his father's, and he completes the works of his father. He continues and he completes the work of creation.



His claims in this chapter on this front are startling. He enjoys judgment, the power to raise the dead, life in himself and divine works. Resurrection is already underway within his action.

He's bringing things into play. He's starting the work of this new creation, fulfilling the Sabbath and anticipating the great renewal of all things. A question to ask.

Within the Gospel of John, we see a number of different signs. This is the third sign. So we've had the turning of the water into wine, the healing of the nobleman's son.

And now this is the third sign. There are three signs that follow on from this. And I believe that there may be a parallel between the signs 1, 2, 3, and then 4, 5 and 6. What might be the parallel between chapter 5 and chapter 9? And how might reading these two accounts alongside each other help us to understand what's going on? A second question.

The healed man in this chapter is given attention not merely as a sign of Jesus' power, but as a paradigmatic disciple. As we read the story of chapter 5 alongside chapter 9, we can see similarities and contrasts. How might these help us to understand the character of the man in chapter 5? And also what John thinks of as discipleship.

What does he see as the fate of disciples, for instance, relative to the Jews?