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Nature of the Covenant with Noah in Genesis 6:18¹

Ronald Rojas

Of all God's covenants with humans explicitly mentioned in the Scriptures, God's covenant with Noah in Gen 6:18 has been the most disregarded by scholars.² When it is not, just a passing comment is commonly offered.³ As a result, God's covenant with Noah has not been seriously taken into account when biblical covenants are defined or examined to find criteria to establish which characteristic binds the biblical covenants all together. The irony of this neglect is that Gen 6:18 has the first occurrence of *b'ērît* ("covenant") in the Bible,⁴ and therefore, it is the pivot text for quarreling on behalf of the unity of the covenants.⁵

1. I dedicate this paper to my mentor Roy Gane who introduced me to and inspired me to have passion for the subject of biblical covenants. This paper was presented at the 9th Annual Seminary Scholarship Symposium, SDA Theological Seminary, Andrews University, Berrien Springs, Michigan, February 8, 2013.

2. It is significant that John Walton, in his commentary on Genesis, avoided commenting on Gen 6:18. John H. Walton, *Genesis*, NIVAC (Grand Rapids, MI: Zondervan, 2001), 313. Likewise Carl F. Keil and Franz Delitzsch, *Commentary on the Old Testament*, 10 vols. (Peabody, MA: Hendrickson, 1996), 1:91; Rolf Rendtorff, *The Covenant Formula: An Exegetical and Theological Investigation*, trans. Margaret Kohl (Edinburgh: T&T Clark, 1998); John H. Sailhamer, "Genesis," in *Genesis, Exodus, Leviticus, Numbers*, vol. 2 of *The Expositor's Bible Commentary*; ed. Frank E. Gaebelin (Grand Rapids, MI: Zondervan, 1990), 84; Gerhard von Rad, *Old Testament Theology*, trans. D. M. G. Stalker, 2 vols. (New York: Harper, 1962).

3. See, for example, Walter Brueggemann, *Genesis* (Atlanta, GA: Knox, 1982), 79; John J. Davis, *Paradise to Prison: Studies in Genesis* (Grand Rapids, MI: Baker, 1975), 122; Derek Kidner, *Genesis*, TOTC 1 (Downers Grove, IL: InterVarsity, 1967), 96; John Skinner, *A Critical and Exegetical Commentary on Genesis*, ICC (New York: Scribner, 1910), 162–63; E. A. Speiser, *Genesis*, AB 1 (Garden City, NY: Doubleday, 1964), 52; Gerhard von Rad, *Genesis: A Commentary*, rev. ed., OTL (Philadelphia: Westminster, 1972), 127; Claus Westermann, *Genesis 1–11*, trans. John J. Scullion, CC (Minneapolis, MN: Fortress, 1994), 423.

4. In relation with Noah, *b'ērît* occurs seven more times in the covenant ratification after the Flood (Gen 9:9, 11, 12, 13, 15, 16, 17). Accordingly, the covenant with Noah has the second major number of occurrences of *b'ērît* in Genesis, being surpassed only by God's covenant with Abraham.

5. Some interpreters see the covenant with Noah as the foundation of the other covenants. See, for example, Roger T. Beckwith, "The Unity and Diversity of God's Covenants," *TynBul* 38 (1987): 107; Steven L. McKenzie, *Covenant* (St. Louis: Chalice, 2000), 8; Edward P. Meadors, *Creation, Sin, Covenant, and Salvation: A Primer for Biblical Theology* (Eugene, OR: Cascade, 2011), 51.

It is the interest of this paper to determine the nature of the covenant with Noah in relation to its continuity and discontinuity in God's overall covenant plan. For that, it will be examined in terms of the factors that motivated the covenant, the structure of the passage, and a close reading of the Hebrew syntax and vocabulary.

Historical Context

After sinning, Adam and Eve did not realize the consequences of their actions. It was with their progeny that they started to experience them. Their firstborn became the first criminal by killing his brother Abel (Gen 4:8). Then Genesis 4 describes how Cain's lineage went from bad to worse (see Gen 4:24).⁶ In this way, the biblical account highlights the fact that sin was not restrained; it did not stop with Adam and Eve. On the contrary, it passed on from generation to generation and spread throughout the earth to such an extent that God declared that "all flesh have corrupted their way" (Gen 6:12 ESV).

Due to God's curse upon the land (Gen 3:17), Lamech expected that his son Noah could give rest (*nāḥam*) to humankind (Gen 5:29). However, unfortunately, it was at that time that God started to regret (*nāḥam*) his creation (Gen 6:6–7). The use of the same verb for Lamech's expectations of his son is parodied by God's feeling. Instead of rest, destruction will come upon the earth.⁷ God's original creation will be cleansed. Thus, a reversal of the creation is in view here.⁸

The verb used to describe the situation of the earth and humankind is *šāḥat* ("to spoil," Gen 6:12), the same used to describe the purpose of the Deluge (v. 17).⁹ This wordplay suggests that God will grant to humankind what they actually want. In other words, God will spoil them because they already decided to be spoiled. Thus, so to speak, God's sentence cannot be seen as a punitive act. This idea is reflected in the following text: "Then hear in heaven and act and judge Your servants, condemning the wicked by bringing his way on his own head and justifying the righteous [*šaddīq*] by giving him according to his righteousness" (1 Kings 8:32 NAS; cf. Deut 25:1).

The principle of the *lex talionis* is also implied.¹⁰ By using the term *kî* ("because," "for"), Gen 6:12 states openly that the reason the earth has been spoiled is the human race. They are responsible for the corruption of the earth. That the earth does not spoil itself is also indicated by the passive voice (*niphāl*). Having this clear, it is understood why the destruction of the earth ultimately means the

6. Von Rad, *Old Testament Theology*, 1:154.

7. Since "all flesh have corrupted" (Gen 6:12), "all flesh" will be destroyed (Gen 6:13, 17). The phrase "all flesh" indicates universality. However, the fact that a group of people and animals were saved indicates that God preserved a remnant. For details concerning the universality of the Flood, see Richard M. Davidson, "The Genesis Flood Narrative: Crucial Issues in the Current Debate," *AUSS* 42 (2004): 49–77.

8. So Meadors, *Creation*, 52; Sailhamer, "Genesis," 80.

9. In v. 17, the verb is prefaced by the preposition *lē*. Such construction is used to indicate purpose. See Thomas O. Lambdin, *Introduction to Biblical Hebrew* (New York: Scribner, 1971), 129; Paul Joüon and T. Muraoka, *A Grammar of Biblical Hebrew* (Rome: Pontificio Istituto Biblico, 2006), 405; Bruce K. Waltke and Michael P. O'Connor, *An Introduction to Biblical Hebrew Syntax* (Winona Lake, IN: Eisenbrauns, 1990), 606.

10. Gordon J. Wenham, *Genesis 1–15*, WBC 1 (Waco, TX: Word, 1987), 172; Keil and Delitzsch, *Commentary on the Old Testament*, 1:90.

cleansing of the human race (v. 13).¹¹ Just as humankind spoiled the earth, God will spoil humankind. God, then, is making justice to the earth.

However, the following section opens with a positive element:¹² “But Noah found favor in God’s eyes” (v. 8). The *waw-disjunctive* with which this verse begins indicates that Noah is introduced as an individual who is the exception.¹³ Thus, God is portrayed as wanting to destroy the earth while at the same time, wanting to save Noah. How God will deal with this awkward situation (of being just) is expressed in the pericope of the establishment of the covenant (vv. 13–22).¹⁴ It is in this historical context that God made a covenant with Noah. Accordingly, Noah’s covenant background was a divine judgment.¹⁵

Structure of Genesis 6:13–22

It is in Gen 6:13 that God makes known to humans what the problem with the earth is and what his plan is to solve it. The preceding verses (Gen 6:5, 11–12) present God’s evaluation of humankind situation: God sees the earth.¹⁶ However, starting with Gen 6:13, God’s actions change from seeing to speaking. That is why commentators agree that Gen 6:13–22 forms a segment¹⁷ which depicts two divine speeches: God’s instruction to build an ark (Gen 6:13–16) and God’s promise to deliver Noah and his family, as well as a group of animals (Gen 6:17–22).¹⁸ Within this unit, several elements such as syntax and word repetitions reveal the cohesion of the verses.

11. Although it is said that “all flesh” will be destroyed (e.g., Gen 6:13, 17), a remnant from both people and animals was left. Therefore, God’s original creation was not undone, as commonly believed; it was just simply cleansed (Slaviša Janković, personal communication to the author, March 8, 2015).

12. Umberto Cassuto, *A Commentary on the Book of Genesis: Part 1, From Adam to Noah (Genesis I/VI 8)*, trans. Israel Abrahams (Jerusalem: Magnes, 1961), 307.

13. So, Wenham, *Genesis 1–15*, 345; John Goldingay, *Old Testament Theology*, 3 vols. (Downers Grove, IL: InterVarsity Press, 2003), 1:173. By overlooking the historical context, Walton has considered the covenant with Noah as *general* (universal) in contrast with the others, which were *specific*. See John H. Walton, *Covenant: God’s Purpose, God’s Plan* (Grand Rapids, MI: Zondervan, 1994), 61. While the covenant with Noah has a universal impact due to the fact that he and his house were the only survivors, the covenant itself was specific for Noah and his descendants: “I will make a covenant with you [Noah]” (Gen 6:18).

14. See Craig G. Bartholomew, “Covenant and Creation,” CTJ 30 (1995): 23.

15. Arthur W. Pink, *The Divine Covenants* (Grand Rapids, MI: Baker, 1973), 66; Chun Sik Park, “Theology of Judgment in Genesis 6–9” (PhD diss., Andrews University, 2005), 209.

16. According to Sarna, the phrase “the Lord saw” has juridical overtones in Gen 6:5 due to the fact that God is presented as investigating facts and being ready for action. Nahum M. Sarna, *Genesis* (Philadelphia: Jewish Publication Society, 1989), 47.

17. See Umberto Cassuto, *A Commentary on the Book of Genesis: Part 2, From Noah to Abraham (Genesis VI 9/XI 32)*, trans. Israel Abrahams (Jerusalem: Magnes Press, Hebrew University, 1961), 55–71; David A. Dorsey, *The Literary Structure of the Old Testament: A Commentary on Genesis-Malachi* (Grand Rapids, MI: Baker, 1999), 51–52; Victor P. Hamilton, *The Book of Genesis: Chapters 1–17*, NICOT (Grand Rapids, MI: Eerdmans, 1990), 279–85; Kenneth A. Mathews, *Genesis 1–11:26*, NAC 1A (Nashville, TN: Broadman & Holman, 1996), 361–70; Speiser, *Genesis*, 54; Bruce K. Waltke, *Genesis: A Commentary* (Grand Rapids, MI: Zondervan, 2001), 135–37.

18. Herman Gunkel, *Genesis*, trans. Mark E. Biddle (Macon, GA: Mercer University Press, 1997), 143.

The verb *šāḥat* (“to spoil”) occurs in both Gen 6:13 and 17, having God as the subject. It is used to describe what God will do to the earth because of the deprivation of humankind (see also Gen 6:12). The repetition of the verb “to spoil” in v. 17 serves to repeat the thought of v. 13, either as an *inclusio* (to close) or as a resumption (to continue). Since the unit does not end here, the most obvious is that the latter is in view.

The repetitive use (five times) of the verb *‘āsāh* (“to do”) delimits vv. 14–16. In fact, the verb is found both at the beginning of v. 14 and at the end of v. 16, forming thus an *inclusio*. God’s specific instruction to Noah for building the ark is enclosed in these verses. In this way, it is obvious that Gen 6:14–16 should be seen as a unit.

Then, v. 17 starts with a *waw-disjunctive*, whose function is to break the line of thought to provide further information of what is being spoken. God is again the subject of the verbs. In fact, Gen 6:17 repeats the idea of Gen 6:13.¹⁹ Then again, in v. 18b the subject of the verb changes from God to Noah. This reveals that, in some way, there is a break in v. 18a. Both v. 17 and v. 18a have a *Hiphil* verb. The former has the earth as the direct object; the latter has Noah as the direct object. Since v. 17 refers to God’s destruction in contrast to God’s saving of Noah, it indicates that the *waw* in v. 18a should be taken as conveying an adversative nuance.²⁰ That means that the covenant must be seen as the redemptive God’s solution from the Flood²¹ and as a matter of life or death.²²

This is also reinforced by comparing Gen 6:5–8 with Gen 6:11–18. Verses 5–6 describe the corruption of the entire earth, while v. 7 states God’s decision because of it. Then, v. 8 introduces an exception, namely, Noah. The meaning is that humankind is spoiled, but not Noah. The same pattern is found in Gen 6:17–18a: because the earth is spoiled (Gen 6:11–12), God will destroy it (Gen 6:13, 17); however, he will establish his covenant with Noah. Just as the positive side of Gen 6:5–8 is not found until the destruction of the earth is stated, the positive side of Gen 6:11–18 is not found until the flood is affirmed.²³ Therefore, Gen 6:18 should be seen as a turning point in this narrative.

Verses 19–20 form a perfect parallelism. Both verses mention the animals and then the expression “two of every sort...to keep [them] alive” (שְׁנַיִם מִכָּל תְּבִיאָה לְהַחִיָּת). They reveal that the purpose of entering into the ark is to preserve the life (see also 7:3).²⁴

In this context, it is significant to notice that God is acting passively. Noah is the one who has to build the ark (v. 14), to enter with his family into it (v. 18b), to bring animals into it (v. 19), and to get enough edible food for himself, his family, and the animals (v. 21). It seems that Noah has to save himself.²⁵ Apart from

19. So Mathews, *Genesis* 1–11:26, 365.

20. The action cannot be sequential, because it would imply that Noah and his family would enter into the ark just *after* the flood.

21. Bartholomew, “Covenant and Creation,” 23; Goldingay, *Old Testament Theology*, 1:173; John H. Stek, “‘Covenant’ Overload in Reformed Theology,” *CTJ* 29 (1994): 27.

22. Park, “Theology of Judgment in Genesis 6–9,” 209.

23. Wenham, *Genesis* 1–15, 174.

24. Davidson, “The Genesis Flood Narrative,” 63.

25. See Sarna, *Genesis*, 52.

declaring the coming flood and how to be saved from it, the only action that God does on behalf of Noah is the establishment of the covenant (v. 18a). This suggests that the covenant plays an important role in this narrative.

Although this pericope is understood as having most verbs in imperative mode, the truth is that imperative verbs are found only in Gen 6:14 and 21. Since a discontinuity is introduced in Gen 6:17, Gen 6:17–20 should be understood as predictions, not commands.²⁶ Finally, it should be observed that the subject of the verbs goes back and forth from God to Noah. Only when Noah is the agent is the term “ark” (*tēbāh*) mentioned.

A. God (v. 13)

B. Noah (vv. 14–16)

A'. God (v. 17–18a)

B'. Noah (vv. 18b–22)

All the above observations show that Gen 6:13–22 are tightly connected. They can be outlined in the following way:

A. God decides to destroy humankind and the earth (v. 13)

B. God commands Noah to build an ark (vv. 14–16)

C. God will cause to bring [*bō'*] a flood to destroy everything (v. 17)

D. God makes a covenant with Noah (v. 18a)

D'. Noah and his family shall enter in the ark (v. 18b)

C'. Noah will cause to bring [*bō'*] animals to keep them alive (vv. 19–20)

B'. God commands Noah to victual the ark (v. 21)

A'. Noah obeys God (v. 22)

The Meaning of Qûm in Gen 6:18

An examination of covenants in ancient Near Eastern texts has revealed that כרת ברית (“to cut a covenant”) is the standard formula for covenant-making.²⁷ However, in the Old Testament, many examples of covenant-making are lacking this formula (e.g., Gen 6:18; 9:9, 11, 15, 17; 17:7, 19, 21). In fact, in the book of Genesis, כרת ברית is used once for God’s covenant with Abraham (15:18) and four times for covenants among humans.²⁸ It is absent in the covenant with Noah (6:18; 9:9, 11, 17) and Isaac (17:19, 21), where instead, הקים ברית (“to establish a covenant”) is found. The ratio of these two formulas in Genesis is 5 (כרת ברית) to 7 (הקים ברית); when God is involved, the ratio is 1 (כרת ברית) to 7 (הקים ברית).

26. Wenham, *Genesis 1–15*, 172. Although no imperative is found in vv. 17–21, Gen 7:9, 16 interprets vv. 18a–20 as God’s commands. “Then Noah and his sons and his wife and his sons’ wives with him entered the ark because of the water of the flood. Of clean animals and animals that are not clean and birds and everything that creeps on the ground, there went into the ark to Noah by twos, male and female, as God had commanded Noah” (Gen 7:7–9 NAS).

27. M. Weinfeld, “*bērît*,” *TDOT* 2:257–59. For a list of the 57 treaties currently extant from ancient Near Eastern texts, see John H. Walton, *Ancient Israelite Literature in Its Cultural Context: A Survey of Parallels between Biblical and Ancient Near Eastern Texts* (Grand Rapids, MI: Zondervan, 1989), 95–100.

28. In Genesis, כרת ברית occurs four more times, but they refer to covenants made between people: Abraham-Abimelech (21:27, 32), Isaac-Abimelech (26:28), Jacob-Laban (31:44).

Thus, from a statistical perspective, it can be said that in Genesis, כרת ברית is not the standard expression to make a covenant.²⁹ Besides, it shows that unlike כרת ברית, הקים ברית is never used for covenants among humans.³⁰

In Gen 6:18, הקים ברית is used for the covenant-making with Noah. This is its first occurrence out of seven in Genesis. Its usage in this passage is still debated. For some, הקים ברית is just a synonym of כרת ברית.³¹ They argue that its incidence is due to the different sources used, namely, the Priestly source (P) and the Yahwist source (J): Where כרת ברית occurs, J is in view; and where הקים ברית, P is in view. This approach (source criticism) solves the problem based on the preference of the covenant formula by different biblical authors. This solution is an easy way to alleviate the problem. Even if these interpreters are right about P and J sources, they do not offer any reason why the P source departs from the standard usage of covenant-making formula (כרת ברית) by using הקים ברית.³² Consequently, the “documentary thesis,” even though it tries to give the cause, is deficient in presenting a rationale for the different covenant formulas in P and J sources, which is essentially what matters.

To date, the best study of הקים ברית in relation to כרת ברית comes from William J. Dumbrell.³³ He has proposed that הקים ברית is consistently used for the continuation of a relationship, rather than its initiation (Gen 26:3; 38:8; Deut 8:18; Jer 34:18).³⁴ In this way, he saw the covenant with Noah as formalizing a previous covenant arrangement. This implies, then, that there was already a preexistent covenant. For Dumbrell, the preexistent covenant was the covenant with Adam.

29. Dennis McCarthy saw three common elements in all OT covenants: (1) preamble with its historical prologue, (2) promises and obligations, and (3) blessing-curse formula. Dennis J. McCarthy, *Old Testament Covenant: A Survey of Current Opinions* (Richmond, VA: Knox, 1972), 1–10.

30. Köhler noted that in the Scriptures, כרת (plural) + ברית is used for covenants between equals, while כרת (singular) + ברית + עם (with) is used for covenants granted only by a superior. Likewise, he observed that הקים ברית is used for covenants initiated by God because he is sure to make it stand up. Ludwig Köhler, “Problems in the Study of the Language of the Old Testament,” *JSS* 1 (1956): 4–5.

31. Beckwith, “The Unity and Diversity,” 99 n. 23; Matthews, *Genesis 1–11:26*, 367; Paul R. Williamson, *Sealed with an Oath: Covenant in God’s Unfolding Purpose* (Downers Grove, IL: InterVarsity Press, 2007), 73; Weinfeld, *TDOT* 2:260.

32. John Day, to my knowledge, is the only one who has made an effort from a Source Criticism approach to find a reason for the use of הקים ברית rather than כרת ברית in the P source. He proposes that the P writer has ברית הקים “because for him the only major covenants were those with Noah and Abraham (Gen 9:8–17; 17:1–21).” John Day, “Why does God ‘Establish’ Rather than ‘Cut’ Covenants in the Priestly Source?” in *Covenant as Context: Essays in Honour of E. W. Nicholson*, ed. A. D. H. Mayes and R. B. Salter (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2003), 92.

33. William J. Dumbrell, *Covenant and Creation: An Old Testament Covenantal Theology* (Nashville, TN: Nelson, 1984); idem, *The Faith of Israel: A Theological Survey of the Old Testament* (Grand Rapids, MI: Baker, 2002), 25; idem, “The Covenant with Noah,” *RTR* 38 (1979): 1–9.

34. Dumbrell’s main argumentation has been preceded and followed by many interpreters. See, for example, Peter J. Gentry and Stephen J. Wellum, *Kingdom through Covenant: A Biblical-Theological Understanding of the Covenants* (Wheaton, IL: Crossway, 2012), 155–61; Bartholomew, “Covenant and Creation,” 26; Gerhard F. Hasel, *Covenant in Blood* (Mountain View, CA: Pacific Press, 1982), 31; L. DeQueker, “Noah and Israel: The Everlasting Divine Covenant with Mankind,” in *Questions disputées d’Ancien Testament: Méthode et théologie*, ed. C. Brekelmans, BETL 33 (Leuven: Leuven University Press, 1989), 128; Umberto Cassuto, *Genesis VI 9/XI* 32, 67–68; Wenham, *Genesis 1–15*, 175; Matthews, *Genesis 1–11:26*, 367; Gordon J. McConville, “*bērît*,” *NIDOTTE* 1:748–49.

The Meaning of “My Covenant”

The covenant with Noah is called “my covenant.” According to grammarians, the possessive “my” means possession or relation.³⁵ Since the covenant is something abstract, the sense here is that of possession. In this way, the covenant could be seen as belonging to God. If this is the meaning of “my” here, the covenant is not something new; rather it is being shared with Noah. This is also supported by the direct object marker *et*, which is almost always used with a definite noun,³⁶ implying that God is not speaking of any covenant, but of *his* covenant. Thus, it should be conceded that the covenant with Noah refers to an already-existent covenant that God is freely passing to Noah.³⁷ For William. J. Dumbrell, this was “the most natural interpretation”³⁸ of the phrase “my covenant.”

Paul R. Williamson, on the other hand, has challenged this interpretation by calling attention to Exod 19:5, where “my covenant” is used for the establishment of the covenant with the Israelites at Sinai.³⁹ The significance of this passage for the understanding of “my covenant” lies in the fact that unlike the covenant with Noah, the verb *kārat* is the one used for its ratification (Exod 24:8). If, as Dumbrell insisted, the verb *kārat* is always used to initiate a covenant, then “my covenant” cannot refer to an already-existent covenant here.⁴⁰ Williamson suggested that the expression “simply underlies its *unilateral* character,” that is, “God describes his covenant as ‘my covenant’ because he initiated it and he alone determines its constituent elements” (emphasis supplied by the author).⁴¹

While Williamson was right on arguing that *kārat* presents a problem concerning the continuity of the covenant at Sinai with the previous ones and the unilateral character of the covenant, his interpretation does not preclude Dumbrell’s interpretation that the phrase “my covenant” refers to an already-existent covenant. Why? First, the initiation of a covenant with the Israelites does not necessarily indicate that the covenant is distinct from previous ones. The verb *kārat* may be used to refer to the initiation of the covenant with a new group of people, or simply that God is adding a new phase to the covenant already known by their forefathers.

35. Waltke and O’Connor, *An Introduction to Biblical Hebrew Syntax*, 303; Ronald J. Williams and John C. Beckman, *Williams’ Hebrew Syntax* (Toronto: University of Toronto Press, 2007), 48.

36. Waltke and O’Connor, 162; Jouön and Muraoka, 415; Williams and Beckman, 168.

37. Gunkel commented that the possessive pronoun “my” expresses the notion that God grants to Noah his covenant in free grace. Gunkel, *Genesis*, 145.

38. Dumbrell, *Covenant and Creation*, 24.

39. Williamson, *Sealed with an Oath*, 72.

40. Williamson, 73.

41. Williamson, 74.

Second, the expression “my covenant” in Exod 19:5 seems to resemble Exod 6:3–5⁴² rather than Exod 24:7–8.⁴³ At least three details seem to aim in that direction. (1) The keeping of “my covenant” is presented as the condition to enjoy the benefits offered. The people together accorded God’s proposal (Exod 19:8). Their response suggests that they already knew⁴⁴ the conditions implied in the expression “my covenant.” In this way, “my covenant”⁴⁵ must refer back to something. Moreover, (2) the *raison d’être* for the Israelites’ liberation from Egypt to possess the land was God’s covenant with Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob (Exod 2:24; 6:2–8). Therefore, the covenant at Sinai should be understood under the umbrella of the covenant with Abraham.⁴⁶ Finally, (3) the expression “my covenant” is not found in Exod 24:8.

Gen 6:18 in Relationship with Gen 9:9–17

By rendering Gen 6:18 and 9:9 “I will establish my covenant with you,” English translations seem to suggest that the same group of people is in view in both passages. Nevertheless, it is quite clear in Hebrew that the covenant made with Noah before the Flood (Gen 6:18) is not addressed to the same group to whom it is addressed after the Flood (Gen 9:9). The Hebrew text says that the covenant in Gen 6:18 was made “with you [singular],” whereas in Gen 9:9, it was made “with you [plural].” The ambiguity comes from the fact that modern English language does not distinguish the second person singular (“you”) from the second person

42. Terence E. Fretheim, *Exodus*, IBC (Louisville, KY: Knox, 1991), 209.

43. S. R. Driver, *The Book of Exodus*, CBSC (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1911), 170. Joe M. Sprinkle has elucidated a chiasmic structure in Exod 19–24, which allows one to see how Exod 19 is related to Exod 24. Joe M. Sprinkle, “Law and Narrative in Exodus 19–24,” *JETS* 47 (2004): 242.

A. Narrative: Covenant offered (19:3–5)

B. Law (general): Decalogue (20:1–17)

C. Narrative: People fear (20:18–21)

B’. Law (specific): Body of the covenant (20:22–23:33)

A’. Narrative: covenant accepted (ratified) (24:1–11)

44. A Jewish legend found in *Pesikta Rabbati Piska 21* says that God went to Esau, the children of Ammon and Moab, and the children of Ishmael, and he asked them: Will you accept the Torah? All of them asked God for the content of it before giving an answer. However, when God went to Israel and asked them to accept the Torah, they immediately answered: We will do and hearken (Exod 24:7). W. G. Braude, *Pesikta Rabbati: Discourses for Feasts, Fasts, and Special Sabbaths*, trans. William G. Braude, 2 vols., YJS 18 (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1968), 1:417. This legend presents the Israelites as promising action even before the content of the Torah is known. It should be noticed, anyhow, that the legend is based on Exod 24:7, and not Exod 19:5.

45. Richard J. Sklba sees a full covenant-making in Exod 19:1–8, thus dividing the relationship with Exod 24. Richard J. Sklba, “Redeemer of Israel,” *CBQ* 34 (1972): 3–4.

1. Preamble: a summons by God (v. 3b)

2. Historical prologue (v. 4)

3. Stipulations (v. 5a)

4. Blessings (vv. 5b–6a)

5. Acceptance in a solemn assembly (vv. 7–8)

46. Fretheim, *Exodus*, 209.

plural (“you”). Hence, modern English translations are misleading in these two texts.⁴⁷

In chapter 6, God only addresses Noah (Gen 6:13), while in chapter 9, he addresses both Noah and his sons (Gen 9:1, 8). However, the fact that entering the ark is seen as the reason for the covenant indicates that the covenant was implicitly made with all those who entered the ark, including the animals.

It is interesting to notice how those who will enter the ark are described: “And you [Noah] shall come into the ark: you, and your sons, and your wife, and your sons’ wives, with you” (Gen 6:18b).⁴⁸ This text depicts those who will come into the ark besides Noah. But while the second person (Noah) is included in the verbal form (*ûbā’tā*), the second personal pronoun (“you”) is added as part of the group accompanying Noah. Thus, the pronoun “you” referring to Noah is superfluous.

However, several details suggest that the pronoun “you” should be detached from the second clause (“and you [Noah] shall enter in the ark”). First, its placement at the end of the clause does not permit it to connect *directly* with the verb “to enter,” which appears at the beginning of the clause. If this were the meaning intended, the author would have put the pronoun next to the verb.⁴⁹ Furthermore, the use of the *waw* with several subsequent nouns indicates that the *waw* is connecting those appositional nouns with “you” by way of a list of people. In this way, the simple subject becomes a compound subject.

According to grammarians, when several nouns are to be added appositionally to the main simple subject, the resumptive pronoun is repeated (e.g. Gen 7:1; 13:1; 17:9; Exod 20:10).⁵⁰ This means that the first mentioned person (Noah) is representative of the subsequent ones (Noah’s sons, Noah’s wife, and Noah’s sons’ wives). Thus, when it says that Noah shall enter into the ark, it is clarified that those belonging to Noah’s house should enter as well (Gen 6:18; 7:7, 13; 8:16, 18).⁵¹ A similar example is found in Gen 13:1 where it says that Abraham went up [singular] to Egypt (Gen 13:1a), but then it is made clear that his wife Sarah and his servants went up with him as well (Gen 13:1b).

This representative function suggests, then, that when God was making a covenant with Noah, he was implicitly making it with his family as well. That such is the case may be confirmed by reading Gen 9:9, 11, where the plural “you”

47. Old English translations (e.g., ASV, DBY, DRA, ERV, GNV, KJV, YLT) keep the difference between the second person singular and plural by using the archaic pronoun “thou” for the singular and “you” for the plural.

48. Note that in Gen 6:18, males are listed first, then females. Noah’s family list is mentioned several more times in this narrative (Gen 7:7, 13; 8:16, 18). Only in Gen 8:16 does Noah’s wife precede Noah. Sarna says that because husband and wife are not listed together, Midrashic sources inferred that sexual intercourse was prohibited in the ark (Genesis Rabba, 31:12; 34:7). Sarna, *Genesis*, 58. However, Gen 8:18 is after 8:16 and the males-females order is resumed.

49. Joüon and Muraoka, *A Grammar of Biblical Hebrew*, 507.

50. Joüon and Muraoka, *A Grammar of Biblical Hebrew*, 508; Waltke and O’Connor, *An Introduction to Biblical Hebrew Syntax*, 295; Frederic C. Putnam, *Hebrew Bible Insert: A Student’s Guide to the Syntax of Biblical Hebrew* (Quakertown, PA: Stylus, 2002), 10. This is also done in order to avoid confusion since the verb (which is singular) will not agree in number with the nouns.

51. The pronoun “you” used in Gen 6:18 has been replaced by the proper noun “Noah.” Both are governed by the verb *bô’* (“to enter”). The same pattern (“you,” then “Noah”) is found after the flood: “You” occurs in 8:16 occurs and “Noah” occurs in 8:18. However, now they are governed by the verb *yāša’* (“to get out”). A closer look reveals that when God is the speaker “you” is used, but when the narrator is the one who describes the events “Noah” is used.

(*ittkem*) is found in the making of the covenant with Noah and his sons. When Gen 6:18 is compared with Gen 9:11, it is evident that the singular *ittāk* (“you”) has been replaced by the plural *ittkem* (“you”). However, one wonders why the writer was not consistent in this matter. Does the author have different nuances in view?

Whereas God speaks only to Noah in Gen 6 (v. 3), God speaks to both Noah and his sons in Gen 9 (vv. 1, 8). This simple recognition helps one to understand why the covenant in 6:18 is made only with Noah (*ittāk*);⁵² yet in 9:9, 11, it is made with both Noah and his sons (*ittkem*). Although this can suggest that distinct covenants are in view, the above argument indicates that they are the same. However, it is not clear why the recipients vary if both texts refer to the same covenant.

A plausible reason is that Noah’s sons were not born when God established his covenant with Noah.⁵³ According to Gen 5:21, Noah begot his sons after he was 500 years old.⁵⁴ Concerning Shem, it is said that he was 100 years old two years after the Flood (Gen 11:10). If Noah was 600 years old when the Flood came (Gen 7:6) and Shem was 98 years old (100 – 2 = 98), it indicates that Shem born when Noah was 502 years old. The significance of this chronological recognition is that God spoke to Noah 120 years before the Flood (Gen 6:3).⁵⁵ According to the narrative, Noah was 600 years old when the deluge came (Gen 7:6). This means that God spoke to Noah 120 years before he was 600 years old. Thus, Noah was 480 years old when God promised to establish a covenant with him. Since Noah became a father after he was 500 years old, at the age of 480 he was childless. Accordingly, it is comprehensible why God did not speak to both Noah and his sons in Gen 6:18, namely, Noah’s sons were not yet born.

Therefore, Noah had to practice faith, not only in believing that a deluge was ready to come, but also in believing that he would have children. Faith in having descendants is not only found in the covenant with Noah, but also permeates the covenant-making in Genesis. Adam, Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob did not have children when God made a covenant with them. They had to believe that a seed would come from their own bodies.

As to the animals, although they were part of the covenant (9:10–12), they were not mentioned in the covenant before the Flood either. The same that was said for Noah’s sons may be said for the surviving animals, namely, they were not

52. Morphologically, the suffix *kē* refers to a feminine, not a masculine person. This would imply that the covenant was not made with Noah, but with a female figure. However, whenever *kē* is found in pausal form, as it is in this case, it may also refer to a masculine person. Friedrich W. Gesenius, *Gesenius’ Hebrew Grammar*, trans. A. E. Cowley (Oxford: Clarendon, 1910), 330 §103b.

53. In Genesis the covenant-making seems to include the promise of a seed (Gen 3:15; 15:4–6).

54. Although pre-Flood people lived long lives, they became fathers at a relatively early age. For example, according to Genesis 5, Mahalalel became the youngest recorded father at the age of 65 (Gen 5:15), whereas Methuselah, who had the longest life, became the oldest recorded father at the age of 187 (5:27). Thus, the fact that Noah was 500 years old (more than 300 years older than his predecessors) when he first became a father is striking in the narrative. So Gunkel, *Genesis*, 138.

55. Josephus understood the 120 years as the life-span of humankind. Josephus, *Ant.* 1.75. Today many commentators believe likewise. For example, Mathews, *Genesis 1–11:26*, 335; Wenham, *Genesis 1–15*, 142; Cassuto, *Genesis VI 9–XI 32*, 297–98; Skinner, *A Critical and Exegetical Commentary on Genesis*, 144–45; Sarna, *Genesis*, 46; Sailhamer, “Genesis,” 77; Walton, *Genesis*, 296. However, because most people lived more than 120 years even after the flood (see Gen 11:10–31), it is preferable to see the 120 years as a reference to the period ending with the beginning of the Flood. Hamilton, *Genesis 1–17*, 269; Keil and Delitzsch, *Commentary on the Old Testament*, 1:86; Speiser, *Genesis*, 46.

mentioned because they were not there yet (6:19). However, when God made his covenant after the Flood (9:1–17), Noah and his family and the animals were all together, possibly next to the ark (cf. 8:15–20).

Two Covenant Phases

Based on the previous discussion, it is clear that covenant-making had at least two phases: one before and one after being delivered. The first phase is called the promissory covenant.⁵⁶ In this phase, God promises to give some benefits to humans for nothing. Humans are only expected to say either yes or no. No stipulations are mentioned. Thus, it is based on God's grace. The second phase is the covenant ratification.⁵⁷ It focuses more on the conditions of the covenant. It is in this phase where the covenant is approved and sanctioned formally by a sacrifice (e.g. Gen 15:9–11; Exod 24:4–8; Heb 9:18–20).

An obvious question emerges from these two phases. Why does God first promise and then ratify his covenant? Taking into account that stipulations are not explicitly mentioned in the first phase in contrast to the second phase, Gane implied that the laws or stipulations are for people who are “*already saved by grace*” (my emphasis).⁵⁸ In this way, unlike humans who make covenants based simply upon promises, God establishes his covenant on the basis of what he has already done on behalf of his people. What Gane suggested is that the first phase is necessary in order to assure his people that he will fulfill his promises and that they may accept God's covenant by love only. T. Desmond Alexander, however, claimed that the reason is to concede a probationary time to the beneficiaries so that they can show their loyalty to God.⁵⁹ While Alexander was right in seeing the subjective side of the covenant, he overlooked the fact that stipulations are lacking in the first phase. Moreover, in so saying, he was implying that after the ratification, there was no turning back.⁶⁰ Nevertheless, the history of the covenants reveals that benefits can be lost at any time.⁶¹ Consequently, Gane's proposal should be favored.

56. For details see, Walter Vogels, *La promesse royale de Yahweh préparatoire à l'alliance: Étude d'une forme littéraire de l'ancien testament* (Ottawa, ON: University of Ottawa Press, 1970), 45–75, 133–152; idem., *God's Universal Covenant: A Biblical Study* (Ottawa, ON: University of Ottawa Press, 1979), 2.

57. George E. Mendenhall, “Covenant Forms in Israelite Tradition,” *BA* 17.3 (1954): 50–76. See also Klaus Baltzer, *The Covenant Formulary in Old Testament, Jewish, and Early Christian Writings*, trans. David E. Green (Philadelphia: Fortress, 1971); 9–18.

58. Roy Gane, “The Role of God's Moral Law, Including Sabbath, in the ‘New Covenant’” (2003), 5, <http://adventistbiblicalresearch.org/sites/default/files/pdf/Gane%20Gods%20moral%20law.pdf>

59. T. Desmond Alexander, “Genesis 22 and the Covenant of Circumcision,” *JSOT* 25 (1983): 21.

60. Gordon J. Spykman affirmed that the covenant is one-sided (unilateral) in its origin, but two-sided (bilateral) in its continuation. Gordon J. Spykman, *Reformational Theology: A New Paradigm for Doing Dogmatics* (Grand Rapids, MI: Eerdmans, 1992), 263–264.

61. Walton has identified four types of jeopardy in God's covenant with his people: Benefit jeopardy, abortive jeopardy, circumstantial jeopardy, and revelation jeopardy. Walton, *Covenant*, 94–107.

Why with Noah?

The most obvious detail in the covenant with Noah is that God is the initiator.⁶² In the narrative, God is the active agent while Noah is passive. God is the one who decides both to reveal his intention concerning the earth to Noah and to make a covenant with him (Heb 11:7).

In this way, God is presented as offering the covenant as a favor, that is, an undeserved gift.

Therefore, Noah's salvation depended completely on God (see 2 Pet 2:5). That is why only one reason is given in the narrative as to why God saved Noah: "But Noah found grace in the eyes of the Lord" (Gen 6:8). The expression "to find grace in the eyes of" occurs forty-three times in the OT.⁶³ It means that a good disposition is granted upon someone (Gen 32:5; 39:4; Deut 24:1).

This does not mean that God's grace upon Noah was a divine caprice. In the very next verse (v. 9), three details are given that seem to provide the rationale for Noah's election:⁶⁴ "Noah was a righteous [*šaddîq*] man, blameless [*tāmîm*] among the people of his time, and he walked [*hālaq*] with God" (Gen 6:9 NIV).⁶⁵

A survey of the phrase "to find grace in the eyes of" seems to suggest that the grace can be gained (Gen 32:5; 39:4; Deut 24:1; Ruth 2:10; 1 Sam 25:8; Prov 3:4). For example, Jacob sent his servant to speak to Esau so that he might "find grace" in Esau's eyes (Gen 32:5, MT 6). The use of the preposition *lě* suggests that "to find grace" is the expected result of something previously done.⁶⁶ The same construction appears in Gen 33:8. Because of it, a few English versions (NEB, NJB)⁶⁷ prefer to translate the verb *māša'* ("to find") as "to win." In doing so, they understand that Noah gained God's grace. They see an effect-cause pattern in vv. 8–9. Such a pattern is not uncommon in Hebrew thinking.⁶⁸ The idea would be, then, that Noah found favor by virtue of his character.

This concept is also found later on in Scripture. In Ezek 14:14, 20, Noah is presented as being saved because of his own justice (*šādaq*). The same word occurs in Gen 6:9 to describe Noah's character.⁶⁹ In the same way, Noah is presented in the NT as being saved because of his piety. 2 Pet 2:5 says that God did not forgive Noah's contemporaries, but saved Noah and his house. Then, 2 Pet 2:9 says that just as God knows how to save the godly (*eusebeîs*), he punishes the ungodly

62. Hasel, *Covenant in Blood*, 19.

63. Edwin Yaumachi, "hēn," *TWOT*, 303.

64. Hamilton, *Genesis 1–17*, 276; Mathews, *Genesis 1–11:26*, 346, 368.

65. Hans K. LaRondelle equated the covenant relationship with "walking with God." Hans K. LaRondelle, *Our Creator Redeemer: An Introduction to Biblical Covenant Theology* (Berrien Springs, MI: Andrews University Press, 2005), 18. Nevertheless, it should be noted that Enoch "walked [*hālak*] with God" (5:22, 24), and God did not make a covenant with him. John H. Stek is against seeing the God-human relationship as fundamentally covenantal. Stek, "'Covenant' Overload," 40.

66. The combination of the preposition *lě* + infinitive construct is used to indicate purpose or result. See Joüon and Muraoka, *A Grammar of Biblical Hebrew*, 405; Waltke and O'Connor, *An Introduction to Biblical Hebrew Syntax*, 606.

67. Although the NET Bible has "to find favor," it argues in its note that in Gen 6:8, divine grace is earned.

68. See Jacques Doukhan, *Hebrew for Theologians: A Textbook for the Study of Biblical Hebrew in Relation to Hebrew Thinking* (Lanham, MD: University Press of America, 1993), 193.

69. Unlike Gen 6:9, *šādaq* in Ezek 14:14, 20 is feminine because the noun that accompanies it is feminine.

(*adikous*).⁷⁰ The parallelism between these two verses implies that Noah was saved because he was a godly person. Later in the narrative of the destruction of Sodom and Gomorrah, it is made clear that God does not destroy the godly [*sdq/ eusebeis*] with the ungodly [*raša'asebes*] (Gen 18:23).

Moreover, Jewish literature corroborates this view.⁷¹ The book of Jubilees says that Noah was saved “for his heart was righteous in all his ways” (Jub 5:19),⁷² and Sirach says that a remnant was left because “Noah was found perfect and righteous” (Sir 44:17). Other documents only present his blameless character without suggesting that as the reason Noah was saved (Sibylline Oracles 1.125).⁷³

In addition, Alexander has noticed that the covenant with Noah has the same structure as the covenant with Abraham in Gen 17.⁷⁴ For example, the divine command to “walk (*hālaq*) before me, and be perfect (*tāmīm*)” (Gen 17:1) resembles Noah’s description in Gen 6:9:⁷⁵ “Noah was a just man, perfect (*tāmīm*) in his generations. Noah walked (*hālaq*) with God” (NKJV). Of interest, here is that Alexander observed that in the Hebrew verbal sequence imperative + cohortative, the second clause expresses the purpose or result.⁷⁶ Since this pattern is found in Gen 17:1–2, where v. 1 has the imperative and v. 2 has the cohortative, he concluded that the covenant of v. 2 is conditional to the command stated in v. 1.⁷⁷ In this way, he proposed two phases in the covenant-making. The first phase is the promissory covenant and the second phase is the covenant ratification, in which the latter is subordinated to the former.

This pattern (imperative + cohortative) is also found in Gen 12:1–3. Verse 1 has the verb in imperative and vv. 2–3 have most verbs in cohortative. The implication is that Abraham should first obey (depart from Ur to the Promised Land) in order to enjoy the covenant benefits of vv. 2–3. The same can be said of Noah. He should build the ark and enter into it in order to enjoy the covenant benefits. The parallel between these two covenants suggests seeing Noah’s character as the reason why he was chosen.

All of these reveal that in the covenants, certain conditions were imposed upon the beneficiary. However, the conditions were not with the goal of earning the benefits but of keeping them.⁷⁸ Walton suggested that the covenant benefits can

70. The adjective *adikos* literally means “unrighteous.” Thus the fact that *eusebeis* is in contraposition to *adikos* in this passage indicates that the “godly” are those who are not only devout, but also righteous.

71. For the references, I am indebted to Jacques Van Ruiten, “The Covenant with Noah in Jubilees 6.1–38,” in *The Concept of the Covenant in the Second Temple Period*, eds. Stanley E. Porter and Jacqueline C. R. De Roo, JSTSup 71 (Leiden: Brill, 2003), 167–90.

72. Robert H. Charles, *The Apocrypha and Pseudepigrapha of the Old Testament*, 2 vols. (Oxford: Clarendon, 1913), 2:20.

73. Charles, *The Apocrypha and Pseudepigrapha*, 1:338.

74. See T. Desmond Alexander, *From Paradise to the Promised Land: An introduction to the Pentateuch* (Grand Rapids, MI: Baker, 2012), 180; Alexander, “Genesis 22,” 19–20. Williamson saw an ethical obligation as prerequisite of the covenant with Abraham by looking back to the covenant with Noah. Paul R. Williamson, *Abraham, Israel, and the Nations: The Patriarchal Promise and Its Covenantal Development in Genesis*, JSOTSup 315 (Sheffield: Sheffield, 2000), 174–176.

75. Significantly, the word “perfect” (*tāmīm*) is found only in these two occasions in Genesis.

76. See Lambdin, *Introduction to Biblical Hebrew*, 119.

77. Alexander, “Genesis 22,” 19.

78. Here is found the two-sided (bilateral) elements of the covenant, which Spykman noted. For details, see footnote 53.

be endangered if disobedience is found. Thus, a tension is found between faith and works, the same one found in the New Testament (Eph 2:8; Jas 2:26), where works are seen as a result of faith (Gal 5:6).⁷⁹

On the other hand, it should be noted that the biblical account presents Noah as coming from a faithful lineage (Gen 5) in contrast to an unfaithful lineage (Gen 4:17–24). The interesting fact about this division is that the faithful lineage seems to be presented as the chosen one through whom the promised “seed” (Gen 3:15) would come.⁸⁰ This lineage is defined as those who commenced worshipping the Lord’s name publicly (4:26).⁸¹ Consequently, it should not be overlooked that God made a covenant with Noah because he was part of the chosen lineage. The same can be said of Abraham. This indicates, then, that God’s election did not originate in Abraham, as is commonly argued, but with Seth.⁸²

This passage may suggest the reason why the word *bērīt* was absent in the covenant with Adam.⁸³ According to Gen 4:26, being recognized as those who invoke the Lord’s name was not necessary until the time of Seth’s son, probably to make clear that throughout Seth’s descendants there was always a faithful descendant.⁸⁴ Thus, Noah’s genealogy seems to suggest that God never runs out of followers, an unbroken line, as promised in Gen 3:15.⁸⁵

The implication of this is that since the covenant with Noah was made at a time when everyone was found being evil in God’s eyes, its purpose was primarily to preserve God’s people in a critical situation⁸⁶ “so that God’s promise of redemption could be realized.”⁸⁷ This perception also sheds light on the fact that God’s covenant with Noah was based only on grace. God saved Noah from the Flood for the same reason he saved the Israelites from Egypt’s slavery, namely, because of his promise to their fathers (see Gen 6:18; Exod 2:24; 6:5–8). When this concept is appreciated, it is understandable why God is interested in making a covenant

79. Roy Gane, “Covenant of Love,” Syllabus for GSEM 538 Covenant, Law, Sabbath, Andrews University, 1997, 84.

80. Sailhamer, “Genesis,” 69.

81. The phrase “to call upon God’s name” (לְקַרְא בְּשֵׁם יְהוָה) is found later in Genesis in relation to God’s worship (12:8; 13:4; 21:33; 26:25). See Hamilton, *Genesis 1–17*, Mathews, *Genesis 1–11*:26, 292; Westermann, *Genesis 1–11*, 340–41. Since it is very clear that this is not the first time people worshiped the Lord, Gordon Wenham contended that it is better to understand Gen 4:24b as referring to the beginning of public worship. Wenham, *Genesis 1–15*, 116. Moskala, nevertheless, insisted that public worship results in public preaching. Therefore, he suggested, like Luther, that the verb *qāra*’ means “to proclaim” here. Jiri Moskala, “The Concept and Notion of the Church in the Pentateuch,” in “*For You Have Strengthened Me*”: *Biblical and Theological Studies in Honor of Gerhard Pfandl in Celebration of His Sixty-Fifth Birthday*, ed. Martin Proebstle (St. Peter am Hart, Austria: Seminar Schloss Bogenhofen, 2007), 13–14.

82. Walton did not take into consideration the covenant with Noah because he did not find the concept of election, which he believed was the feature that binds all the covenants. See Walton, *Covenant*, 47. However, a close reading reveals that the covenant with Noah indeed included “election.”

83. For the biblical basis for the covenant with Adam, see O. Palmer Robertson, *The Christ of the Covenants* (Phillipsburg, NJ: Prebyterian & Reformed, 1980), 93–108.

84. T. Desmond Alexander, “Genealogies, Seed and the Compositional Unity of Genesis,” *TynBul* 44 (1993): 265.

85. For further study regarding the family tree in Genesis, see T. Desmond Alexander, “From Adam to Judah: The Significance of the Family Tree in Genesis,” *EvQ* 61 (1989): 15–19; Alexander, “Genealogies” 255–70.

86. Cf. Stek, “‘Covenant’ Overload,” 25, 39. Walton has argued very well that the establishment of a covenant is often followed by a dark period of spiritual history. Walton, *Covenant*, 63–81.

87. LaRondelle, *Our Creator Redeemer*, 19.

with his people and why his covenant/promise is unconditional, that is, because he will fulfill what he promised in Gen 3:15. Consequently, it is understandable why this promise became “foundational for the covenants to follow.”⁸⁸

Conclusion

An examination of the historical context has revealed that the covenant with Noah was motivated by God’s judgment upon humankind.⁸⁹ However, while scholars concede that the covenant was essentially made in order to preserve Noah and his family from the flood,⁹⁰ they overlook the fact that their preservation was essential to uphold the promise of Gen 3:15 and that God’s covenant with Noah involved the promise of a seed, just as in other covenants (e.g. Abraham, David).⁹¹ In this manner, the covenant with Noah should be understood as being offered unilaterally, in the sense that God initiated it and he alone determined its constituent elements, and upholding a previous covenant, possibly that of Gen 3:15.

In addition⁹², a careful look at the larger context (Gen 4:26) seems to suggest that the word *bērît* is not present before Gen 6:18 because the term is possibly used to distinguish the faithful ones in a critical situation. If this is the case, it is understandable why Noah’s righteous character is highlighted in the narrative.

With regard to the definition of the covenant, Gen 6:18 reveals that many covenant definitions are found faulty when they are applied to the covenant with Noah.⁹³ For example, neither the so-called “Immanuel principle”⁹⁴ (“I will be your God, and you will be my people”) nor the taking of an oath⁹⁵ is found in this covenant. Thus, these covenant-formulas cannot be taken as an essential element of God’s covenant with his people. On the other hand, this study showed that the

88. Paul R. Williamson, “Covenant: The Beginning of a Biblical Idea,” *RTR* 65 (2006): 6; Williamson, *Sealed with an Oath*, 58. Spykman affirms: “At the heart of the covenant is the divine promise.” Spykman, *Reformational Theology*, 259. Cf. also Richard M. Davidson, “Interpreting Old Testament Prophecy,” in *Understanding Scripture: An Adventist Approach*, ed. George W. Reid, BRIS 1 (Silver Springs, MD: Biblical Research Institute, 2005), 197.

89. Bartholomew, “Covenant and Creation,” 23; Stek, “‘Covenant’ Overload,” 27.

90. Scott Hahn, *Kinship by Covenant: A Canonical Approach to the Fulfillment of God’s Saving Promises* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 2009), 97; Rolf Rendtorff, “‘Covenant’ as a Structuring Concept in Genesis and Exodus,” *JBL* 108 (1989): 387; Rolf Rendtorff, “Noah, Abraham and Moses: God’s Covenant Partners,” in *In Search of True Wisdom: Essays in Old Testament Interpretation in Honour of Ronald E. Clements*, JSOTSup 300 (Sheffield: Sheffield, 1999), 133.

91. Roger T. Beckwith affirmed that all covenants point forward to Christ. Beckwith, “The Unity and Diversity,” 107.

92. James Barr, “Reflections on the Covenant with Noah,” in *Covenant as Context Essays in Honour of E. W. Nicholson*, eds. A. D. H. Mayes and R. B. Salters (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2003), 12–13.

93. This is one of the reasons why the covenant with Noah is left out when theologians deal with the covenants. Another reason is that in recent decades, the interest has been in making connection with ANE treaties, and the covenant with Noah seems to have no relationship at all with those treaties.

94. Robertson, *The Christ of the Covenants*, 46.

95. Gordon Hugenberger has argued that the failure to mention an oath does not mean that it was absent in practice. Gordon P. Hugenberger, *Marriage as a Covenant: A Study of Biblical Law and Ethics Governing Marriage Developed from the Perspective of Malachi*, VTSup 52 (Leiden: Brill, 1994), 11. In fact, Beckwith has shown that the oath elements is found in only two or three covenants (with Abraham, the Israelites, and David). Beckwith, “The Unity and Diversity,” 103–107. Niehaus, in the same line, affirmed that the covenant with Noah is the exception to this rule. Jeffrey Niehaus, “Covenant: An Idea in the Mind of God,” *JETS* 52 (2009): 234.

promise of a “seed” plays a paramount role in all covenants.⁹⁶ Therefore, more attention should be given to it in covenant theology studies.

96. Davidson, “Interpreting Old Testament Prophecy,” 197.