

“God's Covenant with Noah: the Rainbow”

LaPorte New Church Swedenborgian

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Scripture

Genesis 9:8-17

John 16:25-33

Hymns/Songs

“How Gentle God's Commands” 111

“Hymn of Promise”

“Praise to The Lord the Almighty”

Genesis 9:8-17

⁸ Then God said to Noah and to his sons with him, ⁹ “Behold, I establish my covenant with you and your offspring after you, ¹⁰ and with every living creature that is with you, the birds, the livestock, and every beast of the earth with you, as many as came out of the ark; it is for every beast of the earth. ¹¹ 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.” ¹² 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: ¹³ I have set my rainbow in the cloud, and it shall be a sign of the covenant between me and the earth. ¹⁴ When I bring clouds over the earth and the rainbow is seen in the clouds, ¹⁵ I will remember my covenant that is between me and you and every living creature of all flesh. And the waters shall never again become a flood to destroy all flesh. ¹⁶ When the rainbow is in the clouds, I will see it and remember the everlasting covenant between God and every living creature of all flesh that is on the earth.” ¹⁷ God said to Noah, “This is the sign of the covenant that I have established between me and all flesh that is on the earth.”

John 16:25-33

I Have Overcome the World

²⁵ “I have said these things to you in figures of speech. The hour is coming when I will no longer speak to you in figures of speech but will tell you plainly about the Father. ²⁶ In that day you will ask in my name, and I do not say to you that I will ask the Father on your behalf; ²⁷ for the Father himself loves you, because you have loved me and have believed that I came from God. ²⁸ I came from the Father and have come into the world, and now I am leaving the world and going to the Father.”

²⁹ His disciples said, “Ah, now you are speaking plainly and not using figurative speech! ³⁰ Now we know that you know all things and do not need anyone to question you; this is why we believe that you came from God.” ³¹ Jesus answered them, “Do you now believe? ³² Behold, the hour is coming, indeed it has come, when you will be scattered, each to his own home, and will leave me alone. Yet I am not alone, for the Father is with me. ³³ I have said these things to you, that in me

you may have peace. In the world you will have tribulation. But take heart; I have overcome the world.”

Insight for Worship

Revelation Explained 701(26) by Emanuel Swedenborg

[26] There was also a covenant entered into with Noah: “That mankind should no more perish by the waters of a flood, and that a bow should be in the cloud for a sign of that covenant.” (Gen. 6:17, 18; 9:9, 17). Conjunction of the Lord through Divine truth is involved also in that covenant, as can be seen from the explanation of the above in *Secrets of Heaven* (n. 659–675, 1022–1059). That “the bow in the cloud,” or the rainbow, here signifies regeneration, which is effected by Divine truth and a life according to it, and that consequently that bow was taken for a sign of the covenant, may also be seen in the same work (n. 1042).

Secrets of Heaven 7693 by E. Swedenborg

“To look upward to heaven is not merely to think about the things that belong to heaven, but to have these things as the goal, and to love them more than all other things.”

SERMON: “God’s Covenant with Noah: the Rainbow”

Next week our wonderful Midwest Swedenborgian adult and children’s summer camp, the Almont New Church Assembly, will meet online as we did last year, and again we will offer a week of morning chapel services and adult lectures. Our Almont theme is: “Storms and Rainbows.” My day will be Friday, July 30th, and I hope you can be a part of it. My focus will be on the story of the Great Flood, also known as Noah’s Ark and God’s new covenant with Noah and his family, seen within the rainbow! My sermon this morning is a primer for my July 30th offerings for the Almont Summer Camp next week.

There are many reasons I feel profoundly grateful to the Lord for establishing His New Christian Church era during the Age of Enlightenment. One of the most important reasons for me is that through the theological revelations of this church there are some enormous biblical problems that are solved in a very sensible and rational way. One of these incredibly helpful Bible problems that has been solved deals with the first eleven chapters of *Genesis*. The story of Creation in *Genesis 1* and the marvelous yet quite nonsensical story of Noah’s Ark and the Great Flood that was said to happen over only 40 days and nights, and the Tower of Babel account are all gripping stories to be sure—but, on a literal and historical level they don’t add up. They don’t make sense, do they?

For example, how is it that both Noah's family and so many pairs of animals and tons of food could fit inside of a boat that was only about 450 ft. long, 75 feet wide and 45 feet high? Or, have you asked yourself how was it that it rained for only 40 days and nights in a row and somehow the entire earth and her mountains were covered with water?

The simple, plain truth is, the first eleven chapters of *Genesis* were never intended from the beginning to be literally and historically true. Those gripping stories were never intended by the Lord to be used as historical nor scientific revelations, but rather as very important and very meaningful symbol stories (very much like Jesus' many parables He told). When we learn that the first eleven chapters of *Genesis* were handed down ancient myth stories loaded with vital symbolism, then a whole new depth of appreciation grows regarding these ancient mythical tales! The Great Flood story, for instance, helps us to understand that when a person yields to very severe temptations, we can say of him: "Gosh, what a terrible inner storm he's gone through! It was too much for him to stand up to; he was swept off of his feet and great was his fall!"

Another example is that Adam and Eve picture mankind during our great Golden Age, living in total peace, harmony and with love for God and all others. Indeed, our very ancient ancestors lived freely and they were immensely open and close with the Lord. They conversed easily with God and with angel people in Heaven, and they did not need a written Holy Word whatsoever. They saw God and all of God's goodness everywhere they looked and they only enjoyed a way of life based in love and faith. Spiritually speaking, our Most Ancient Church ancestors were living symbolically in a "garden paradise," and the imagery and symbolism of *Genesis* early on is totally accurate.

But then, for some reason, our Golden Age forebears decided to take a proverbial "fork in the road." God had given them ample warning not to abuse their freedom of choice by taking a right turn when they should have taken a left turn. The ancient biblical myth of Adam and Eve listening to the crafty serpent slithering on his belly in the Garden of Eden depicts this unfortunate choice people began taking many thousands of years ago. Instead of following God's ways and the Divine commandments of loving the Lord above all else and their neighbors more than themselves there were people who felt it was time to take the wrong turn spiritually speaking and explore life in rebellion against our Creator. And so these great ancient myths show the Golden Age people choosing to take that unfortunate fork in the road by as it reads "eating from the tree of the knowledge of good and evil," seeing themselves as smarter than God. They are expelled from the Garden of Eden, symbolically speaking, and then we see a terribly sad snowball effect unfold in these great stories. Adam and Eve's two sons, Cain and

Abel, were each experts in their own ways: Cain was a farmer while Abel was a keeper of sheep...and then on the literal level of the story it says that God had favorable regard for Abel's offering of sheep and fat, while concerning Cain's offerings of the fruit of the ground God arbitrarily had no regard. We then read: "Cain was very angry, and his face fell." (Gen. 4:5) Then, the first murder takes place on Earth! Cain rose up against his brother Abel while in the fields and he murdered him in cold blood...as the story goes.

Increasing corruption builds on Earth and in *Genesis 6:5* it reads: "The LORD saw that the wickedness of man was great in the earth, and that every intention of the thoughts of his heart was only evil continually." Our theology teaches that our Most Ancient Church era ancestors were different than we are today for another reason: their will or intentionality was fully fused with their thinking aspects of mind, so the more corrupt their wills became their thinking and rationalizing of their evils played along. Their own reasonings were more attractive to them than the "tree of life," in the center of their garden. A powerful symbolic message lives on in their tragic failing, which is that just as those very ancient people created the first impulses of evil in this world, the same basic false ways of thinking can be very attractive to us, when we allow ourselves to think that we know better than God about what is good for us in life. And once we start going down that pathway or road in life, it gets easy to stray off of the Lord's pathway of what is good and true, choosing instead our own self-centered way instead: "For wide is the gate and broad is the road that leads to destruction, and many enter through it. ¹⁴ But small is the gate and narrow the road that leads to life, and only a few find it." (Mtt. 7:13-14)

In short, the vast majority of people long ago went down a pathway of spiritual decay and eventual destruction. However, there was a small remnant of good human beings long ago, pictured by our virtuous Noah and his family. The bulk of humanity developed into spiritual monsters of selfishness, which caused a horrible "great flood" of evil and false ways of thinking to spread all over the world. So, we see then, that the massive flood that destroyed those rebellious people was not a flood of water, but rather it was a flood of falsity and evil. The relatively few good people back then remained true to God, still recognizing their need of God and they tried to obey Him—those people are pictured by Noah and his family. The Ark in which Noah's family rode out the great flood symbolizes the good character that Noah's family were able to build by following and obeying the Lord's commands.

So, you see, every element and each facet of these awesome spiritual myths, written down by the posterity of the Golden Age, to enable us all to never forget our great beginning on Earth, nor the unfortunate downfall that occurred when people chose to take the wrong fork in the road long ago.

Our primary focus for this morning, though, is first of all to recognize how tempting it can be to start following our own ways of rationalizing our own stubborn ways of life, which leads us into more and more and worsening false ways of thinking, until we start to “drown our minds in a flood of rationalizations.” We hear this difficulty in us, these strong tendencies to think selfishly, pictured by the growing corruption of ancient people, as *Genesis 6:5* reads: “The LORD saw that the wickedness of man was great in the earth, and that every intention of the thoughts of his heart was only evil continually.” And so, when we find ourselves tempted to do what we know is wrong, our only way of safety is to first of all reach out to the Lord in prayer, and then **stick fast to God’s commandments!** It can all feel and appear to be overwhelming at first, just like Noah shut up within the Ark riding out a long, scary storm at sea—but, if we are steadfast and stick close to the Lord and follow His ways, then the time will come when we no longer feel so afraid inside of the journey we’re on. Indeed, eventually the temptations we’re facing won’t seem so horrendous, the storms will pass, and then we will be able to step forth into a fuller and freer pathway of life!

Noah and his family picture the truly brave and love-centered kinds of people who choose to ***stand up in the face of temptation and stop following the crowds.*** The story of Noah is here to teach us that just like all of the other characters in the Word, so is that brave commander! We all are gifted by God with the strength and faith of Noah. And just like them, if we choose to follow the Lord and His ways by obeying His truth, then like them we will be able to ride out the ferocious storms within us and begin a new and better way of life.

But look what else is revealed to us by massive rainstorms? When we ourselves go through a very dark, very windy and difficult storm in our lives, all of a sudden...through the darkest clouds shines through rays of God’s sunshine! And then a beautiful arch of colors bends over the skies of our minds, a spiritual rainbow! Just as the physical sunshine lights up bits of water droplets falling above us creating a luminous natural rainbow, so too is God able to light up pieces of truth from His Word inside of our minds when we choose to remain steadfast to the Lord and His truths of life.

What a perfect symbol is the rainbow of the Lord’s power to protect and bless us no matter how dark life may seem! Whenever we may see a natural rainbow now, we can remember the Lord’s promise to Noah, a promise of the Lord’s loving care. Maybe this is why we love to see rainbows so much, because they remind us that the Lord is always near....and they teach us that even in life’s darkest storms, God is able to shine His Light of Love and Truth through us, through rainbow colors arching overhead, helping us relax because the Lord is here. I hear this same powerful truth paraphrased by the Lord Himself when He said, “**I have said these things to you, that in me you**

may have peace. In the world you will have tribulation. But take heart; I have overcome the world.” (John 16:33) Amen.