THE IMPORTANCE OF THE NOAHIC COVENANT AND ITS FUNCTION AS THE BASIS OF CREATION CARE

by

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ABSTRACT
The importance of the Noahic covenant and its function as the basis of creation care
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Ecological crises are consequences of both the curse on the earth and the damage inflicted by the damaged image-bearers of God. Among many arguments and approaches for environmental care the concept of stewardship is important and useful for creation care but the concept itself has its limitation and cannot do all the work that can radically reorient our attitudes to the rest of the creation. The Noahic covenant is the only covenant in Bible that specifically and repeatedly includes creation in its content. By re-examining this covenant, we have fuller understanding of the relation between creation and covenant and can obtain a more foundational perspective for creation care within a covenantal context. By re-examining this long ignored covenant within redemptive history, we not only find the basic framework of all administrations of the covenant of grace but also the restoration of its connection with the covenant of creation. In Noahic covenant, God reveals more fully the scope and grandeur of His purpose in creation. It is incorrect to relegate the Noahic covenant to the peripheral status of general revelation. The Noahic covenant in itself has its own redemptive purposes. Jesus Christ’s redemptive work is not limited to human beings but includes the whole of creation. If human beings are created as the capstone of creation as the kings and queens to rule it, then in Christ renewing all things, it necessarily begins, but does not stop, with renewing the kings and queens in His image. The Christian’s primary concern
is not the salvation of his individual soul but the glory of God, which extends beyond the individual and encompasses all aspects of creation. Creation care thus becomes a touchstone on whether we are a covenant keeper of breaker.
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CHAPTER 1
INTRODUCTION

Whatever one’s view of the details of any particular debated ecological problem, all can agree that there are multiple ecological crises with which we must reckon in today’s world. In view of these crises facing us today, there are various proposed justifications for environmental ethics. Some perspectives fall into the danger of pantheism or naturalism, while others deal with the issue simply on a pragmatic level. Lynn White, in his pivotal article “The Historical Roots of Our Ecologic Crisis” (1967), accuses Christianity for being responsible for the ecologic crisis. By using the plow method change as an example, White points out that man’s relation to soil profoundly changed from being part of nature to the exploiter of nature. White claims that “especially in its Western form, Christianity is the most anthropocentric religion the world has seen,” and attributes it to the story of the creation in Genesis 1 where “God planned all of this explicitly for man’s benefit and rule: no item in the physical creation had any purpose save to serve man’s purposes.”

The ecological complaint against Christianity is not new. Feuerbach, for example, comments: “Nature, the world, has no value, no interest for Christians. The Christian thinks only of himself and the salvation of his soul.” However, it is in response to White’s accusation that the ecological crisis deserves deeper attention from the theological field.

Why has Christianity seemed to be indifferent towards environmental issues? Is it because of the emphasis within Christian tradition on dualisms of soul and body, spirit and matter, God and nature? Is it because of a perceived inadequacy in Christian eschatology which posits an otherworldly mode of future existence? Is it because some have thought that with Jesus’ return, everything will be destroyed, and there is no need to take care of what Christians expect to be obliterated?³

Many have tried to resolve the perceived indifference of Christianity towards ecological issues. For example, Northcott presents a new ecological reading of concepts such as covenant, land, justice and natural law in the Bible and the Christian traditions, and finds in natural law tradition an ethical vision to reconnect the quest for social justice and the common good in human society and for sustainability and ecological harmony in the natural world.⁴ Others, such as Roman Catholic theology, for example, have tried to establish environmental ethics from a liturgical and sacramental perspective.⁵ These attempts and efforts are important and helpful for looking into the important contemporary issue. However, is the environmental issue contemporary only?

Re-examining the Noahic Covenant

White’s contribution is to point out that the roots of the present crisis facing us are largely religious and thus the remedy cannot be separated from religion; however, his praise


of Francis as a patron saint for ecologists and proposition to set up a democracy of all God’s creatures ought not be the solution. Borrowing from the Reformation slogan, “Ad fonts,” we must return to the beginning. The Bible begins with Genesis, not Exodus; with creation, not redemption. Environmental ethics begins with creation. When Adam was created, he was appointed as the gardener and builder responsible to the Creator in a covenantal relationship. Genesis has provided the framework for establishing environmental ethics. During creation, Genesis establishes the proper relationship between God, man, and the rest of creation, denying pantheist and naturalist approaches towards environmental ethics. Human beings are created in the image of God; yet after the Fall, the image is damaged and thus ecological crises are consequences of both the curse on the earth and the damage inflicted by the damaged image. After the Flood, however, God establishes a relationship between Himself, humans, and the rest of the creation in His covenant with Noah. The Noahic covenant has grown increasingly important within biblical theology and the context of redemptive history in recent years. By re-examining this long ignored covenant, we not only find the basic framework of all administrations of the covenant of grace but also the restoration of its connection with the covenant of creation. The original covenant of creation or Adamic covenant does not offer details of their content, whereas the Noahic covenant offers stipulations of the original covenant. It is incorrect to relegate the Noahic covenant to the peripheral status of general revelation. The Noahic covenant in itself has its own redemptive purposes. Jesus Christ’s redemptive work is not limited to human beings but includes the whole of creation. If human beings are created as the capstone of creation as the kings and queens to rule it, then in Christ renewing all things, it necessarily begins, but does not stop,

with renewing the kings and queens in His image. So He is renewing nature, but it’s not exactly us as just part of nature but us as the capstone. The Christian’s primary concern is not the salvation of his individual soul but the glory of God, which extends beyond the individual and encompasses all aspects of creation. In light of this, we can establish our responsibility in creation care using the context of this original covenant of creation by examining the Noahic covenant.
CHAPTER 2
SOME ARGUMENTS FOR ENVIRONMENTAL ETHICS

Many arguments for environmental ethics can be made from both Christian and non-Christian worldviews, but the evaluation here will be made from a Christian perspective. Why should one be concerned about the extinction of endangered species? If Jesus’ return will bring the complete destruction of the world, as some believe, why care for it? Bouma-Prediger has summarized ten arguments to support the necessity of caring for the environment.¹ Below are his arguments re-categorized, and briefly listed.

Arguments Related to Individual Self-interest Aspect

Arguments for environmental ethics relating to the individual self-interest aspect include two arguments: self-interests and joyful simplicity. These arguments are shared with non-Christian as well.

Self-Interest Argument

It is in our self-interest to care for the earth. If we protect the trees, for example, we can breathe fresher air. Similarly, the argument would say, we should not damage the rain forest, as there might be some plants or organisms with medicinal value waiting to be

discovered. If we pollute the environment, water, or air, we imperil our own existence. Although this argument is psychologically persuasive, it is morally defective as there is no concern for future human generations or the health of other creatures. Given the intractable human inclination to self-embellishment, such practical arguments will always find a receptive public this side of the eschaton. However, if conservation justifications are only applied to species with direct self-interest benefit to humanity, many will be without protection and might extinct. Many species are of little present or potential self-interest perspective of the ecological needs of humanity, and even if it has certain self-interest value, it may only last until it can be replaced by a “better” alternative. Thus in offering moral arguments, it is required an appeal to some moral standard beyond mere prudence.

Joyful Simplicity Argument

Jesus insists that a person cannot serve both God and money, for he will either hate the one and love the other, or he will be devoted to the one and despise the other (Matt. 6:24). The proclamation “whoever dies with the most toys wins” reflects a consumerism mentality but is a lie according to any plain reading of the Scriptures. Therefore, the statement is made, “Live simply so that others may simply live.” Those who live more simply would tend to use fewer nonrenewable natural resources. Some people criticize this argument by saying that if too many people adopted a simpler lifestyle our current way of life would collapse; therefore, it is not realistic to lead a simple life. Thus, frugality is even considered as a subversive virtue in an economic system heavily depending on compulsive consumption to keep the
system going and growing. Christians ought to challenge the assumption that economic growth is based on consumption and question whether consumerist materialism is worthy of allegiance. Simplicity is not abstention or parsimony; rather to lead a simple life for the sake of focusing on what is truly important in life is to liberate us from the current consumer culture with true contentment (1 Tim. 6: 6-10). A simpler way of life liberates us from following “the lifestyles of the rich and famous” and thereby enables us to find genuine happiness. We live simply because an earth-friendly way of life is more joyful.

Arguments Related to Ethical Obligation

Arguments for environmental protection based on ethical argumentation include obligations for future generations, eco-justice, animal rights, and intrinsic values. These arguments are also shared by non-Christians.

Obligations for Future Generations

The statement “We not only inherit the earth from our ancestors but also borrow it from our children.” captures the sense of obligation for future generations. This statement implies that our descendants, some of whom do not yet exist, are entitled to an inhabitable earth. We should not lead our lives exhausting limited natural resources. Christians ought to be concerned about patterns of consumption that deprive many people from getting their most basic needs met. As all generations are linked by the ongoing relation with the earth, each generation should leave the planet in no worse condition that it received it and provide

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succeeding generations’ equitable access to its resources and benefits. To achieve this we might encounter potentially difficult choices that represent a clear trade-off: decreasing future generations’ living standards as a means of providing current and future generations a better environment. This is an apparent conflict between intergenerational equity and the goal of achieving intra-generational equity, equity among those who are living today. Under complicated global economics, it is even harder to evaluate what is the “correct” obligation. In spite of the difficulties and complexity, this argument has its merit.

Eco-justice Argument

This argument associates ecological harmony and social justice as interdependent goals. Ecofeminists associate the hierarchy of male over female with the hierarchy of human over nature. For example, Ruether claims:

An ecological-feminist theology of nature must rethink the whole Western theological tradition of the hierarchial chain of being and chain of command. This theology must question the hierarchy of human over nonhuman nature as a relationship of ontological and moral value.

If we care for those who are treated unjustly, we should then care for an exploited earth as well. There are correlations and probably causal links between the location of toxic waste

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sites and the residences of people of color or poverty.\cite{Hopkins2009} People who embrace this argument have the tendency to promote axiological egalitarianism. This extremism has invited criticism of the eco-justice argument; however, this should not discourage our quest for justice and the elimination of ‘environmental racism.’\cite{Rasmussen2004}

Animal Rights Argument

This argument is based on the concept that natural rights should be extended to include nonhuman creatures. We \textit{de facto} operate with a scale of value that implicitly grants rights to certain creatures such as pets and farm animals, but conversely, are not given to other creatures such as insects or microorganisms. Animal rights arguments, however, often fail to recognize the larger ecosystem within which individual animals exist. Whether it is morally permissible to kill wild deer depends on the ecosystem within which the deer live. Also, although rights entail duties, duties do not necessarily imply rights. It may be our duty to protect endangered species, even if they do not have moral rights. It is inadequate to view animal right in isolation as it is often intuitive. Animal rights, if they exist, should be discussed in the context of the entire creation.

Intrinsic Value Argument

A central question is: do nonhuman creatures contain value irrespective of their usefulness to humans? The value of a dung beetle in decomposing waste is an example of

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extrinsic value—it is of instrumental value. For something to have intrinsic value means it has value in and for itself. How can one properly claim that value is objectively present in the natural world without human valuing? Even given that valuing is a uniquely human enterprise, we shall not conflate value with valuing. God values creation, in His eyes creation is very good (Gen. 1:31). In Psalm 104, we see nonhuman creatures have value irrespective of their value to us as it testifies the wisdom and glory of the Creator. Psalm 96 declares that all creatures are designed to sing praise to God; they have doxological value! Therefore the creation’s intrinsic value resides in God’s claim.⁹

Arguments Related to Relational Aspect

Earth Community Argument

All of us on the earth are bound together in such a way that our ability to flourish is interdependent. A representative of this argument is Aldo Leopold’s land ethics, “All ethics rest upon a single premise: that the individual is a member of a community of interdependent parts.” From this premise, he formulated his ethical maxim: “A thing is right when it tends to preserve the integrity, stability, and beauty of the biotic community. It is wrong when it tends otherwise.”¹⁰ This argument is related to but different from the self-interest argument, as it is grounded not on an appeal to individual self-interest but on an acknowledgment of the common good. It recognizes that everything is connected to everything else. This argument is biocentric: we should care for the earth because such care is in the best interests of the

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⁹. The Presbyterian Eco-Justice Task Force, Keeping and Healing the Creation (Louisville, KY: Committee on Social Witness Policy, Presbyterian Church USA, 1989), 46, 56.

entire biotic community. A biblical approach would be: we should care for the earth because all creatures are created for the glory of God and designed to sing the praise to God.

Divine Commandment Argument

This argument is straightforward: God commands that we care for the earth and authentic faith requires that we obey God; therefore, we should care for the earth. For example, we see in Genesis 2:15, God created humankind to work and keep the earth. In Leviticus 25, we are commanded to give the land a Sabbath.

The Image of God Argument

We are created in the image of God (Gen. 1:26-27). We represent God to creation and rule as God rules. God rules with care and compassion, remembering His covenant love and hearing the cries of the suffering and oppressed. Indeed only humans are created *imago Dei*, and God gives a unique and much higher value to humans than to other creatures. However, the privilege of human uniqueness is not a license for exploitation but a call to service. As God’s image bearer, when creation cries out for relief from oppression, do we hear it?

The Grateful Heart Argument

If we acknowledge creation as a manifestation of divine grace and recognize that the earth, sky, hill and valley, tree and flower ... etc. are in fact God’s gifts to us, a proper response in gratitude is to care for God’s creatures/creation. Thankfulness drives the
Christian towards love and obedience as depicted in the three parts of the Heidelberg Catechism: guilt, grace, and gratitude.

**Inadequacy of Current Arguments**

Each of the above arguments provides a perspective to justify the necessity of environmental ethics; yet some of them alone are not adequate. There are many reasons why we should care for the earth: the imperiled state of our own existence; our obligation to future generations; the joy in leading an earth-friendly way of life; the various forms of oppression are of a piece; certain nonhuman creatures are entitled to our care; the earth has its own value; it is in the best interests of the entire earth community; it is God’s command; we are God’s image-bearers; and grace begets gratitude and gratitude care. In sum, caring for the earth is required to what it means to be a Christian.¹¹

The arguments of being the image-bearer, divine demand commandment, and the gratitude are compelling and are related to the predominant organizing principle for creation care, i.e. stewardship. Stewardship as an argument and analogy for creation care is good in the following ways: (1) it recognizes we are called to be faithful stewards of God’s good garden, our earthly home;¹² (2) men and women are image-bearers of God and called to serve and love the rest of creation, accountable to God as stewards; (3) our care for creation is an act of worship and obedience towards the Creator; (4) it admits that “our failure to be faithful stewards has caused the current environmental crisis, ... putting the earth’s ecosystems at

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¹¹. Bouma-Prediger, 179.

risk,\textsuperscript{13} and (5) the earth belongs to God, not to us; we are authorized to exercise responsible
dominion and stewardship in using the rich abundance of God’s good creation to provide for
human welfare and needs.\textsuperscript{14} However, like all analogies, it can be misunderstood and have
its limitation in the following ways:\textsuperscript{15} (1) the household metaphor of a steward emphasizes
the management aspect of things rather than of caring relationships; (2) when applied to the
business world, the efficient and productive utilization and multiplication of resources are the
main focus; but creation is viewed more than as “natural resource” in Scripture;\textsuperscript{16} (3) this can
lead to a utilitarian view of creation as it emphasizes the ‘wise use’ of resources. The
utilitarian or instrumental view is related to a limitation of stewardship making it
anthropocentric as it centers too much on the role of the human, divorcing it from the concept
of covenant. This concept of stewardship is important and useful for creation care but the
concept itself cannot do all the work that can radically reorient our attitudes to the rest of the
creation.\textsuperscript{17} By re-examining the relation between creation and covenant, we can obtain a
more foundational perspective for creation care.

\textsuperscript{13} Micah Network, \textit{Declaration on Creation Stewardship and Climate Change} (2009).

\textsuperscript{14} Lausanne Congress for World Evangelization, \textit{The Cape Town Commitment}, Part I, Sec. 7a (2010).


\textsuperscript{16} For example, the use of active and emotive language for creation in relation to the non-human creation: the land moans (Is 33:9; Hos 4:3; Jer 12:11), the trees clap their hands (Is 55:12), the earth trembles (Ps 97:4; 104:32), and the whole creation groans (Rom 8:22). Even these are metaphors that personify nature, they are not just inert matters waiting to be worked on by humans.

CHAPTER 3

NOAHIC COVENANT

Since the Noahic covenant is the only covenant in Bible that specifically and repeatedly includes creation in its content, this covenant is worth close study to understand the biblical basis for creation care within a covenantal context. The Noahic covenant is the first explicit reference to a divine-human covenant found in the book of Genesis. The expression $hēqîm$ berit in Genesis 6:18 seems to assume a covenant previously instituted by God as will be discussed later in this chapter. The question is what prior covenantal institution could be in view? By examining the preceding and subsequent contexts, God’s mandate to humanity in the Genesis creation account is in view.

Adamic Covenant

There is a dispute regarding whether the divine-human relationship between God and Adam can be considered as a covenant. Those who oppose the idea of the Adamic covenant mainly base their views on exegetical argument regarding word choice; there is no explicit reference to the term “covenant” in Genesis 1 or 2. The only explicit textual support for the existence of an Adamic covenant is found in Hosea 6:7: “But like Adam they transgressed the covenant; there they dealt faithlessly with me.” However, due to the
difficulty in its interpretation, no consensus of whether this verse supports the existence of an
Adamic covenant has been reached.\textsuperscript{1}

God planted a garden in Eden and put man in this garden (Gen. 2: 8). In the garden,
Adam is told to “till” (from the root ‘bd) and “keep” (from the root šmr) (Gen. 2:15). When
šmr and ‘bd occur together in the Old Testament (Num. 3:7-8; 8:25-26; 18: 5-6; 1 Chron.
23:32; Ezek. 44:14) they refer to keeping/guarding and serving God’s word and priestly
duties in the tabernacle as well. Specifically, they occur together in the descriptions in
Numbers for the Levites’ duties of guarding and ministering in the sanctuary.\textsuperscript{2} Beale states
that the best translation of Adam’s task in Genesis 2:15 is “to cultivate (work) it and to keep
it [the Garden],” and even if it is likely Adam’s main task is to cultivate as a gardener and
guard the garden, all of his activities should be understood as primarily priestly activities.\textsuperscript{3}

Wenham proposes a list of items in the garden that are parallel with later
sanctuaries to establish the sanctuary symbolism in Genesis 2-3.\textsuperscript{4} The first is the verb “to
walk to and fro” (Gen. 3:8), the same is used to describe the divine presence in the later tent
sanctuaries (Lev. 26:12; Deut. 23:15; 2 Sam. 7:6-7). The second is mention of cherubim
stationed east of the garden to guard the way to the tree of life. The tabernacle and Jerusalem
temple were also entered from the east, implying the garden is guarded by cherubim as an


\textsuperscript{3} Beale, \textit{The Temple}, 68.

\textsuperscript{4} Wenham, \textit{Sanctuary Symbolism}, 399-402.
indication that the garden is viewed as a sanctuary. Thirdly, the tree of life bears fruit that
gives eternal life. A basic principle of the sacrificial law and a recurrent theme of the Psalms
is the fullness of life to be found in the sanctuary. Fourthly, the description of Adam’s job in
Eden suggests it is a sanctuary as discussed above. With such a sanctuary image in mind, the
geographical account of Eden in Genesis 2:10-14 including the four rivers, gold and other
gems appears to be far more relevant than often assumed. These geographical descriptions
could be linked with a later sanctuary design. Water is a powerful symbol of life throughout
Scripture. For example, Psalm 46:4 speaks of “a river whose streams make glad the city of
God” and Ezekiel 47 describes a great river flowing out of the New Jerusalem temple to
sweeten the Dead Sea. Gold is closely associated with the most sacred items of tabernacle
furniture (e.g. Exod. 25:11, 17, 24, 36). Finally, the tree of the knowledge of good and evil
in the garden is described as “pleasant to the sight, good for food and to be desired to make
one wise” (Gen. 2:9; 3:6) echoing in Psalm 19:18-19 where the law is described as “making
wise the simple, rejoicing the heart and enlightening the eyes.” And the law was kept in the
holy of holies! Wenham therefore concludes from these features within Genesis 2-3 suggest
that the Garden of Eden could be seen as an “archetypal sanctuary.”

Further, Adam could be understood as created to be a sort of priest-king who guarded God’s first temple of
creation.

Genesis also reveals the sevenfold structure of creation. For example, Genesis 1:1
has seven words, Genesis 1:2 contains fourteen words, seven times two. Significant words in
this passage occur in multiples of seven: God (35 times, seven times five), earth (21 times,

5. Wenham, Sanctuary Symbolism, 403.

seven times three), heavens/firmament (21 times), “and it was so” (7 times), and “God saw that it was good” (7 times). Numerous parallels are found between the seven days of creation and Moses’ construction of the tabernacle in the book of Exodus. Particular Hebrew phrases between passages in God’s creation of the world in Genesis 1-2 and Moses’ construction of the tabernacle in Exodus 39-40 have also been identified as identical or nearly identical. Thus, the tabernacle is viewed as a mini cosmos. Furthermore, the parallels between creation and the tabernacle are also mirrored in the parallels between the seven days of creation and Solomon’s construction of Jerusalem temple. Again, an association with the temple and creation is observed: the temple’s construction was broadly depicted as a new creation and the temple itself seen as a microcosm or world.

In Genesis 1-3, therefore, there is found the unfolding creation as the construction of a divine temple, the Garden of Eden as an earthly Holy of Holies, and the human person created for liturgical worship. God creates the cosmos to be His temple in which He rests after His creative work. He simply commands creation into existence with ten creative fiats: the phrase “and God said” occurs ten times with royal power (Gen. 1: 3, 6, 9, 11, 14, 20, 24, 26, 28, 29). Jeremiah 33 describes God’s fourth-day creation fiat as His “covenant with day and night” (Jer. 33:20, 25). Some would view this as an allusion to God’s covenant with

8. Ibid., 4 fn 15.
9. Ibid., 5 fn 16, 17.
10. Ibid., 5 fn 18.
11. Ibid., 6 fn 19, 20, 21.
12. Ibid., 6 fn 22.
Noah (Gen. 8:22); yet even if this is correct, the analogy between God’s word of power and His word of precept remains. God describes His control of reality in terms of the covenant.\(^{13}\)

Also, the parallel Paul draws between Adam’s transgression and Israel’s transgressions (Rom. 5:12-14, 20) as well as the contrast between Adam’s disobedience and Christ’s obedience (Rom. 5:15-21) should be noted. Both Israel’s disobedience and Christ’s obedience are to be understood in covenantal categories, either in terms of covenant-breaking or covenant-keeping, therefore, one might argue inferentially for a covenantal understanding of Adam’s relationship to God and the divine law,\(^{14}\) even though the term is not explicitly spelled out. If the garden is an earthly Holy of Holies of a cosmic temple, then Adam and Eve would be understood as the priestly gardener. They are in relation to God in a way that requires them to take good care of the creation by treating it as the divine temple in a priestly manner.

**Parallels between the Prediluvian and Postdiluvian Worlds**

The Flood defaces the original creation headed by Adam and cleanses the earth for its re-creation headed by Noah. Gage notes five striking theological narratives (creation, commissioning, sin, conflict of seed, and judgment) paralleling the prediluvian (pre-Flood) and postdiluvian (post-Flood) worlds, making Adam the father of all humanity and Noah its father in the postdiluvian world.\(^ {15}\) A more detailed examination of such parallels is

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described briefly here. (1) Both “worlds” are created out of a watery chaos in closely parallel acts (Gen. 1: the original creation account; Gen 8: the new creation account). (2) Both Adam and Noah are uniquely associated with the “image of God,” this precise expression is only found in Gen. 1:26-28; 5:3; and 9:6. In the Adam narrative the “image of God” is the basis of man’s identity and in the Noah narrative as the basis of man’s protection (Gen. 1:27; 9:6). 

(3) Both Adam and Noah “walk with God” (3:8; 6:9). (4) Both Adam and Noah rule the animals: Adam by naming (2:19) and Noah by preserving (7:15). (5) God repeats almost verbatim His commission to be fruitful, to multiply, and to rule the earth (1:28-30; 9:1-7). (6) Both Adam and Noah work the “ground” (cf. 3:17-19; 9:20). (7) Both Adam and Noah follow a similar pattern of sinning, the former by eating and the latter by drinking (3:6: 9:21). (8) The immediate result of their sin is shameful nakedness (3:7; 9:21), connected with “knowing” (3:5; 9:24) and being clothed by another (3:21; 9:23). (9) Both have three named sons (4:1-2, 25; 6:10). (10) As a remote result of Adam’s sin, judgment falls on all; from Noah’s, a curse on Canaan. (11) Among their three sons is judgment and hope, division into the elect and non-elect.

In light of such parallelism between the prediluvian and postdiluvian worlds, a further examination of the Noahic covenant may provide a fuller understanding of the Adamic covenant in which many details are lacking in the original creation account.

The First Use of the Term “Covenant”

The first use of the word “covenant” is found in Genesis 6:18, “But I will establish my covenant with you, and you shall come into the ark, you, your sons, your wife, and your

16 Gage, 11.
sons’ wives with you.” (ESV) God as the speaker is addressing Noah. The context of this statement is that the earth was corrupt to the degree that God had to bring to a virtual end of the work of creation with which the book of Genesis had begun. And the idea of covenant itself is intricately woven into the fabric of the biblical account all the way through to Revelation 11 where the “ark of His covenant” reappears in His heavenly temple (Rev. 11: 19). It is worth further investigating the meaning of the covenant and the content of this specific covenant.

Meaning and Usage of Covenant

The Hebrew term for covenant is of uncertain derivation, but it is most commonly connected with the Middle Assyrian noun birtu, meaning ‘bond’ or ‘fetter’.

17 This is supported by the fact, as Dumbrell remarks, that in certain contexts of the Old Testament where relationships are established or confirmed; the word “seems usually to carry with it the note of obligation, whatever else may be implied at the same time.”

18 A possible parallel likely exists between Biblical covenants and the Hittite dynastic suzerainty treaties, in which a vassal would enter into an oath of loyalty toward the king in return for past favors and future protection. Such treaties consist of the preamble, the historical prologue, the basic stipulation, particular conditions, invocation of the gods as witnesses, and the curses and blessings formula.

19 By examining the covenant in the historical books by McCarthy, berit was found to originally refer to a specific act but came to mean a solemn commitment in


general. Since etymology alone is inconclusive, giving rise to wide ranges of meaning (and thus obscuring the meaning of the Hebrew term *berit*), attention is turned to its usage in the Old Testament. *Covenant* is employed primarily in two ways in Old Testament. The covenant often represents an agreement between two parties and both parties enter into the treaty voluntarily leading to a partnership relationship. It could be between individuals such as David and Jonathan (1 Sam. 18:3-4), between families such as Jacob and Laban (Gen. 31:54), or between nations such as Israel and the Canaanites (Exod. 23:32; 34:12, 15). There is even a case when Job makes a covenant with himself (Job 31:1). The second usage involves an arrangement a superior entity imposes upon subordinates (e.g. Joshua 9; 1 Sam. 11:1-2). Usually such an agreement is made to or for, but not with, the subordinate, and consists of a legally binding promise that one party makes toward the other. Parity between the two parties is absent in such case. For example, Ezra 10:3 speaks of making “a covenant with our God to put away all these wives and their children ...” While this type of legally binding promise is occasionally made between men or by men toward God, it is more often made by God toward men. Covenants among/between peers were usually negotiated, but covenants between God and men were not.

In the Septuagint (LXX), the normal translation of *berit* is the Greek term, *diathēkē*. In Hellenistic times, this term exclusively meant “last will and testament,” not exactly the meaning used in the Old Testament. There are some essential characteristics of a last will and testament present in God’s covenants with His people. A will is the declaration of one

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22. Ibid., 176-177.
person’s will, not the result of an agreement between two parties. In God’s covenants, God alone sets the conditions and the elements of God’s grace come through. However, a last will and testament requires the death of the one making it in order for it to become effective. In the New Testament, *diathēkē* is mainly translated as covenant with few exceptions. Hebrew 9:15 speaks of Christ as the mediator of a new covenant. Hebrew 9:16-17 switches the religious setting to a legal framework. In verse 15 the author speaks of Christ’s sacrificial death to redeem those who will receive their promised inheritance. And in verses 16-17 the author states that Christ’s death validates the will. In a sense, these two verses serve as an analogy, and analogy has its limitation. Christ, the Son of God, is not the maker of a will. The emphasis is Christ’s functioning as a mediator and as a guarantor, the conditions of the covenant are met and its promises are honored. The OT covenant does not require the death of the testator to initiate it. On the contrary, the death of one of the parties in the covenant renders it null and void. Also, the testament remains revocable, subject to change, until the death of the testator but God’s covenant is not subject to change. Another alternative translation for covenant *synthēkē* is even more objectionable as it suggests the idea of coequality and partnership between the parties entering into the arrangement. Vos notes that the original sense of *diathēkē* was generic, as a disposition that someone made for himself. Therefore *diathēkē* could suggest a sovereign disposition, and not always of the nature of a last will. The fact that God is not subject to death is a difficulty only from the

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24. Ibid., 257.

25. Ibid., 177.

viewpoint of Roman law. There was a different type of testament that of Graeco-Syrian law in closer times to the Old Testament texts had no necessary association with the death of the testator. This kind of testament can be made and solemnly sanctioned during his life-time, and in certain of its provisions go into immediate effect, unlike the mutability of the Roman-law testament.\textsuperscript{27} The choice of \textit{diathēkē} by LXX translators for \textit{berit} is thus justifiable, and renders the consistency between Old and New Testament usage of the term “covenant.”

Although some human/human covenants in the Old Testament contain the feature of mutuality, there is no element of mutuality found in the case of initiating Old Testament divine/human covenants. Divine covenants are imposed upon the recipients to bind both divinity and humanity.

\textbf{Meaning of “Establish” (\textit{hēqīm})}

The context of the Noahic covenant is the flood of destruction and judgment due to the grave extent of man’s wickedness. In contrast with the rest of mankind, however, “Noah found favor in the eyes of the LORD” (Gen. 6:8), and God instructed him to build an ark with specifications, by means of which he, his family, and two of every living thing would be spared. God’s grace toward them is through establishing a covenant with them.

The typical phrase associated with the initiation of a specific divine-human covenant relationship in the Old Testament is \textit{karat} (cut), seen for example, in the Abrahamic covenant (Gen. 15:18), the Sinaitic covenant (Exod. 24:8), the Davidic covenant (Ps. 89:3), and the new covenant (Jer. 31:31).\textsuperscript{28} However, the verb used in association with the

\begin{footnotesize}
\begin{itemize}
\item 27. Vos, \textit{Biblical Theology}, 24-25.
\item 28. Williamson, 6.
\end{itemize}
\end{footnotesize}
covenant with Noah is *hēqîm* (establish). Dumbrell argues the usage of this verb in Genesis 6:18 infers that the covenant announced there is simply the confirmation of a pre-existing relationship and therefore, Genesis 6:18 refers to an already existing covenant. In the absence of any direct background for the word *berit* in Genesis 6:18, Dumbrell examines three examples of usage of this term within comparable context of the period. The usage of *berit* in the three secular instances of Genesis 21:22-32, 26:26-33, 31:43-54 involve the relation of Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob to others. In Genesis 21:22-32 a dispute over water rights relating to the well of Beersheba is settled between Abraham and Abimelech by a public declaration of respective rights in the form of an announced covenant. A similar undertaking under similar circumstances is found in Genesis 26:26-33, where Isaac reaches an accommodation with Abimelech. And in Genesis 31:43-54, Laban initiates and carries through a covenant with Jacob, in addition to resolving the outstanding property matters, a delimitation of the border thereafter to exist between them is determined. In each case of these three covenants, the covenant does not initiate the relationship which is already in existence. Rather, the covenant gives the relationship a quasi-legal backing and guarantees its continuance.

Other Old Testament contexts with the phrase “establish a covenant”, *hēqîm berit*, occur as well in Genesis 9:9, 11, 17 (Gen. 17:7, 19, 21; Exod. 6:4; Lev. 26:19; Deut. 8:18; 2Kgs. 23:3; Jer. 34:18): “the initial institution of a covenant is not referred to, but its

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30. Ibid., 17.

perpetuation.”

Dumbrell thus surmises that the phrase ‘cause my covenant to stand,’ i.e. ‘establish my covenant’ of Genesis 6:18 refers to the perpetuation of some covenant and not to its initiation.

The Use of Covenant without Introduction

The relationship God establishes with Noah is referred to explicitly as a covenant (Gen. 6:18), but there was no explanation of what a covenant is, nor is there any previous reference for this covenant. Covenant is probably not a new idea to Noah. Though the establishment of a covenant is announced in Genesis 6, it is not until after the flood (Gen. 8-9) that there is the formal ceremonial establishment of this covenant. Coming out of the ark, Noah builds an altar and offers the offering, whereupon God’s first reaction consists of a promise toward creation. Creation’s times and places will continue without the disruption of God’s destructive judgment. In the decree from Gen. 8:21-22 God binds Himself to preserve the earth in its present world-order until the time of the consummation. Only then is Noah addressed. By using hêqîm berît in Genesis 6:18 and 9:9, God seems to be showing the recipients that the relationship needing clarifying is already in existence and now requires further establishment or confirmation by His explicit word of promise. The elaboration of the covenant in Genesis 9 makes it clear that the covenant with Noah is simply a continuation

32. Dumbrell, *Creation, Covenant and Work*, 139.

33. Ibid.


of the arrangement with Adam. The exception is that now this covenant is given to a new race that was sinful from the beginning.

Reiteration of Genesis 1:28

In Genesis 9:1, 7, Noah is blessed and given the commands, “Be fruitful and multiply and fill the earth.” Genesis 9:1-7 is bounded by an inclusion: “Be fruitful and multiply and fill the earth ... be fruitful and multiply, teem on the earth and multiply in it.” Genesis 9:1 is echoing God’s original mandate in Genesis 1:28, “Be fruitful and multiply and fill the earth ....” This command is emphasized by its being repeated again in Genesis 9:7. In both passages, there is a blessing upon the human beings involved so that the commands given to them can proceed with God’s supplying grace.

In Genesis 1:28, there are five imperatives: be fruitful, multiply, fill the earth, subdue, and have dominion over. The first three convey a similar thought, and the last two are similar to each other in meaning. While the task of population increase and dominion over the rest of creation are in the imperative form, they are actually the content of God’s blessing (Gen. 1:28). From Genesis 1:26, to have dominion over all living creatures reflects the purpose for man being created in the image of God. As God is sovereign over all creation including man, so man reflects such sovereignty. However, while Noah is blessed and given the same commands to “be fruitful and multiply and fill the earth” in Genesis 9, the two verbs of Genesis 1:28, “subdue” and “have dominion” are missing. It is possible that the allusion to Genesis 1:26, 28 is enough to remind the reader/audience that after the flood mankind is still called upon to rule and subdue the earth. Hart proposes another possibility:36

36. Hart, 11.
[I]t may also be possible that the text is subtly getting at something which is described in Hebrews 2:8c, “But now we do not yet see all things subjected to him” (cf. Psalm 8:4-6; Heb. 2:6-8). Mankind in a fallen, sinful state may yet attempt to rule and subdue all things as was his original task and calling, but the blessing of actually accomplishing such rule continues to elude him. Such rule is now given to the Christ as the first fruits of the creation (cf. Matt. 28:18-20; 1Cor. 15:25f; Heb. 2:9).

Since the purpose of man’s being created in the image of God is to rule and subdue, and after the flood mankind is still treated as being made in the image of God (Gen. 9:6), the blessing toward Noah includes the commands to “rule and subdue.” Even though they are sinful, they are to increase in numbers so that the image-bearers of God can fill the earth. Moreover, in making a covenant with Noah and his descendants, all the living creatures and earth are also included in the covenant (Gen. 9:10-11, 13). The objects of mankind’s subjugation and rule continue to be preserved so that mankind can act as responsible stewards in relationship to the rest of the creation. Even though the mandate of 'subdue' and 'have dominion over' in Genesis 1:28 are not clearly stated but implied in Genesis 9, therefore, these mandates are still valid.

Differences

A noteworthy change in the elements of creation is mentioned after the flood. Before the fall into sin, creation poses no violent threat to mankind; it is simply a challenge for work and development. After the fall, however, fear and terror have come upon the birds and the beasts of the earth creating a tension between human and animals (Gen. 9:2). After Adam’s fall, the soil produces thistles and thorns that frustrate man’s toiling effort to make a living (Gen. 3:17). Now the animal domain of creation poses a threat to mankind. Man’s rule
thus will be exercised in an unnatural context of “terror” and “dread,” but he continues to maintain his created position as “subduer.”

Man is permitted to eat animal flesh without their blood, but they too may turn on him and claim his life (Gen. 9:5). It is not explicit before the fall whether Adam is allowed to eat animal flesh; it is at least possible (though disputed) that then man and all beasts were vegetarian. After the flood, man may eat of all the beasts of God’s creation (Gen. 9:3) to sustain life, but reverence must be shown for the life-principle of the creature, symbolized by its blood.

By forbidding the consumption of blood, this regulation instills a respect for the sacredness of life and protects against wanton abuse of which God alone has disposal and man is dependent on the permission of God for the use of life.

Man is also given the responsibility to act as a judge (Gen. 9:5-6), something not permitted when Cain murdered Abel (Gen. 4:15). This is not mere permission to execute, God commands it. Whereas in the flood God Himself executes the whole race for their violence (Gen. 6:11-13), He now commands Noah the image-bearer to execute the wickedly violent man. Ultimately this is merciful in the sense that the execution of an individual murderer stops violence before it spreads to the point that it mandates the judgment of an entire society.

37. Robertson, Covenants, 110.
38. Ibid., 115.
Why is it “My” Covenant?

Creatures owe their existence to their Creator. Basically the creature owes obedience to the Creator but the Creator owes nothing to the creature. Because there is a qualitative distinction between the Creator and the creature, all blessing and/or reward from God can come only through voluntary condescension on God’s part. And God is pleased to express this grace by way of sovereignly disposed covenant. In the Adamic covenant, the tree of life was in the midst of the garden, so was the tree of the knowledge of good and evil. Adam was forbidden to eat of the tree of the knowledge of good and evil with a death threat. Therefore, there was held before him the choice of obedience and life or disobedience and death. It is justifiably deduced from Genesis 2:17 that God requires perfect obedience. Although the Old Testament usage of “covenant” could be bilateral, the covenant between God and man can never be understood as “an agreement between two parties as if each agreed to terms sovereignly imposed by the other.” The immediate sense of Genesis 6:18 for the divine announcement appears to be a one-sided arrangement. God calls this covenant as “My covenant” because He sovereignly initiates it and He alone determines the constituent elements. It is His covenant in that it is conceived, devised, determined, established, confirmed, and dispensed by God Himself. The same usage is found in Mosaic covenant (Exod. 19:5) emphasizing its unilateral character. However this unilateral character is the emphasis on the sovereign God’s initiating and setting the terms. The covenant is binding on both God and the recipients. God will do what He has promised to do and require what the recipients should do. Loyalty is required in Mosaic covenant; so is loyalty required of Noah.

and all recipients in the Noahic covenant. The emphasis of “My” covenant does not eliminate the recipients’ obligations.

The Meaning of “Remember”

Wenham points out the extended palistrophic literary form of flood narrative as a mark of its coherence.41 Genesis 6:10 to 9:19 are discovered to be a palistrophe containing thirty-one items. In a palistrophe the first item matches the final item; the second item matches the penultimate item, and so forth. The flood narrative begins and ends with a reference to Noah as shown in Figure 1.42

The palistrophic literary form draws attention to the real turning point in the flood narrative: “But God remembered Noah ....” (Gen. 8:1). It is from that moment the waters start to decline and the earth dries out. God’s intervention is decisive in saving Noah and all lives preserved in the ark. God not only remembered Noah but also all the wild and domestic animals that were with him in the ark (Gen. 8:1).

When the flood is over and there is a new beginning with Noah, Genesis 9:8-11 restates the theme of Genesis 6:18. In Genesis 9:11, an assurance is given that there will never again be a flood to destroy the earth. This is a reiteration of the future harmony of the natural orders guaranteed in Genesis 8:21-22. God also adds a rainbow as a sign of the sustained divine intention never again to destroy the earth through a flood. In vv. 14-16, the function of this sign is explained. When God sees the rainbow set in the clouds He will remember His covenant. In all other covenants, signs are given for the human participants to

42. Ibid., 338.
the covenant, but in the case of Noah the sign is given as a reminder to God of His covenantal commitments. The meanings of this “remember” is not just recollection but the putting into effect of an action. Biblically it is often the case that when one remembers, the past is actualized in present experience.

Genesis 6:10-9:19

A  Noah (6:10a)
B  Shem, Ham and Japheth (10b)
C  Ark to be built (14-16)
D  Flood announced (17)
E  Covenant with Noah (18-20)
F  Food in the ark (21)
G  Command to enter ark (7:1-3)
H  7 days waiting for flood (4-5)
I  7 days waiting for flood (7-10)
J  Entry to ark (11-15)
K  Yahweh shuts Noah in (16)
L  40 days flood (17a)
M  Waters increase (17b-18)
N  Mountains covered (19-20)
O  150 days waters prevail (21-24)
P  GOD REMEMBERS NOAH (8:1)
O’  150 days water abate (3)
N’  Mountain tops visible (4-5)
M’  Waters abate (5)
L’  40 days (end of) (6a)
K’  Noah opens window of ark (6b)
J’  Raven and dove leave ark (7-9)
I’  7 days waiting for waters to subside (10-11)
H’  7 days waiting for waters to subside (12-13)
G’  Command to leave ark (15-17(22))
F’  Food outside ark (9:1-4)
E’  Covenant with all flesh (8-10)
D’  No flood in future (11-17)
C’  Ark (18a)
B’  Shem, Ham and Japheth (18b)
A’  Noah (19)

Fig. 1 Palistrophic literary form of flood narrative in Genesis 6:10-9:19.
In Genesis 8:1, when God remembered Noah, He took action to carry out His promise by causing a wind to blow and assist the waters to subside. The sign of the rainbow carries with it a divine assertion of the stability of creation, an assertion not contingent upon any human response. Also, the sign is not dependent upon human cognition of its significance; its function is specifically to ‘remind’ God. Therefore the sign of the covenant guarantees God’s faithfulness to act on His covenantal promises and points to God’s ongoing commitment to the world He has created. God will remember His covenant (Gen. 9:15-16), with the consequence that He will do (or not do, in this case) what He has promised. The reader of Genesis 9 recalls seeing the word ‘remember’ before, at the turning point of the flood narrative: “But God remembered Noah and all the beasts and all the livestock that were with him in the ark” (Gen. 8:1), after which the flood subsided. Therefore, now the reader understands the relation between the covenant promised to Noah in 6:18 and God’s remembering. In addition to God’s remembrance, the covenant is confirmed by a visible sign, the rainbow, which God Himself will look at and remember His covenant. Human beings will also be able to see it and be assured that, however horrifying the thunderstorm might be, God will be faithful to His promise and will not use a flood to destroy the earth.

The Recipients of the Covenant

Although the covenants with Noah before and after the flood appear to have distinct content, there is no distinction to be made in the Noahic covenant between a prediluvian and

postdiluvian aspect. Before the flood, it seems God only addresses to Noah to establish with him (Gen. 6:18), while after the flood God specifically states that He establishes His covenant with Noah, his sons and offspring, and all living creatures with them. Jeon has distinguished the prediluvian Noahic covenant associated with covenant of royal grant and redemptive nature and postdiluvian Noahic covenant with renewal or recovery of the covenant of common grace. However, when God speaks to Noah and the first time the word covenant appears in the Bible (Gen. 6:18), it is spoken as a promise to Noah that God will spare Noah and together with all living beings that enter the ark together with him (Gen. 6:19-20). This promise points to Genesis 9, where the term covenant is developed in detail. And in the turning point (Gen. 8:1); God not only remembers Noah but also all the beasts and all the livestock in the ark, indicating these living beings are with Noah in the covenant relationship. Robertson suggests that there is no distinction to be made in the Noahic covenant between a prediluvian and postdiluvian aspect. He states that “God’s commitment to ‘preserve’ Noah and his family prior to the flood relates integrally to the ‘preservation’ principle, which forms the heart of God’s covenantal commitment after the flood.” Therefore, the earlier statements merely precede the actual inauguration and implementation of the covenant after the flood.

In terms of recipients, this (along with the covenant with Adam, should one admit that use of the word) is the widest of all the covenants. The beneficiaries of this covenant encompass a wider group of recipients than the other major covenants. First, it seems the

46. Robertson, *Covenants*, 110.
47. Busenitz, 183.
covenant was established with Noah, his sons, and their descendants (Gen. 9:9). Apparently, since only Noah’s immediate family was preserved through the flood, this covenant extended to all mankind who would subsequently populate the earth. As Genesis 9:9 widens the concept of Genesis 6:18 by including Noah’s descendants, it is thus clear that the covenant with Noah is with Noah as representative humanity. Then God enlarged the list to include “every living creature that is with you, the birds, the livestock, and every beast of the earth with you ....” (Gen. 9:10). And lest there be any question as to the extent, He adds in v. 11: “I establish my covenant with you that never again shall all the flesh be cut off by the waters of the flood, and never again shall there be a flood to destroy the earth.” Such detail is given to make the divine concern for even the least of the creatures strongly apparent to Noah. Then in v. 13, God even expands the recipient list further to incorporate the earth: “I have set my bow in the cloud, and it shall be a sign of the covenant between me and the earth.” The earth had been “destroyed” (Gen. 9:11). In Genesis 8:21, where God says, “I will never again curse the ground because of man,” indicates the extent of judgment suffered by the earth when it was “laid waste” by the great flood. The earth as recipient of God’s wrath in this worldwide judgment due to man’s sin, would also receive divine assurance of “never again.” God seals His promise with the continuing sign of a rainbow.

In the Adamic covenant, Adam and Eve are appointed as kingly gardener to engage in creation care in a priestly fashion. After the Fall, even under fallen condition, the restatement of the call to populate the earth first mentioned in Genesis 1:28 is found in Noahic covenant. The Humans are still image-bearers with mandate of ‘subdue’ and ‘have dominion over’ the creation. God reveals more fully to Noah the scope and grandeur of His
purpose in creation. Humans are continued to be bound to obey the mandate of creation care in a covenantal relation with God.
CHAPTER 4
RE-EXAMINING NOAHIC COVENANT

Centrality of the Covenant

The concept of covenant has become a key theme within biblical theology and various covenants have been identified as an important way of approaching the metanarrative of Scripture. However, the focus tends to be on the Abrahamic, Mosaic, and Davidic covenants with the least emphasis placed on the Noahic covenant. Neglect of the Noahic covenant within evangelical circles is widely found. The main reason of such neglect is probably due to its focus on redemptive history, beginning with Abraham in Genesis 12.

The Noahic covenant indeed is a renewal of the cultural mandate; but not merely so, the Noahic covenant is a covenant of grace. God also sets forth elements of land, seed, and redemption, as with the other covenants. By further examining the Noahic covenant, it is found to be central to the broader metanarrative of Scripture.


2. Ibid., 208 fn 3. Also, for example, Trent C. Butler, “covenant” in *Holman Bible Dictionary*, ed. Trent C. Butler (Nashville: Holman Bible Publishers, 1991), 308-312 (only devoted 5% of total discussion on the biblical covenants on Noahic covenant). And in *Evangelical Dictionary of Theology*, ed. Walter A. Elwell (Grand Rapids: Baker Books, 1984), 276-280 (Covenant with Noah is totally omitted and Noah is only found under the entry “Flood”418-419, but not found under “covenant”).


Looking Backward

In the early Genesis account, the divine mandate continued on through Adam’s descendants. Scripture carefully notes that Adam’s son Seth inherits his father’s “image and likeness” (Gen. 5:3). From Seth’s line comes Noah, who is meant to bring relief to the cursed earth: “Out of the ground that the LORD has cursed this one shall bring us relief from our work and from the painful toil of our hands” (Gen. 5:29). God reaffirms the Adamic covenant with Noah, a new Adam. Walke elaborates on the parallel motifs between the origins of the antediluvian era and the postdiluvian era analyzed by Gage and finds the striking parallels between the original creation and the re-creation of the cosmos, as briefly listed here. First, the earth is created (Gen. 1:2) and re-created (Gen. 8:1b-2) out of the chaotic “waters” aided by the sending of the “wind.” The “wind” from God “hovers” upon the face of the aquatic chaos at the beginning, dries up the waters, and the dove flies over them at the new beginning (1:2; 8:9). Second, the “waters” and “sky” are differentiated (1:6-8; 8:2). Third, the floodwater recedes from the “earth,” and the mountaintops “appear” as had the original dry land (1:9; 8:3-5) in connection with the olive leaf representing vegetation (1:11-12; 8:11). Fourth, the restoration of birds to the sky above the “ground” is seen as the deliberate imaging of the original creation in a mirror (8:6-12; cf. 1:20-23). Fifth, the “birds,” “animals,” and “creatures that move along the ground” are called out from the ark, like in the first creative calling from the voice of God (1:20, 24-25; 8:17-19). Sixth, the reappearance of the nuclear family—Noah and his wife—bearing “the image of God,” as the heads and sole representatives of the human race, functions as a reprise of the original creation of “male and female.” The Creator again “blesses” humanity and restores the mandate and implicitly to

“rule every creature” (1:28; 9:1-2). Seventh, after God finishes His original creation work, He rests from His work, and after He restores the renewed earth, He finds “rest” in the aroma of the sacrifice (2:2; 8:20-21).

The covenant with Noah refers to the special relationship God enters into with Noah, his family, all living creatures, and the earth. Theologically underlining this covenant is God’s covenant with creation, with Noah as the covenant representative. Thus, God is acting in and through Noah to fulfill what He has always intended for the whole of His creation.6 With this covenant, God is reaffirming His purpose in creation.

Looking Forward

In Genesis 1:1-2:4a, God calls upon humanity to enjoy the harmony of order as then created. Genesis 6:18 is “a beginning in terms of covenant theology of the long path by which a return to the original harmony will be made possible.”7 Therefore, later a progressive development of covenant theology in the Old Testament can be viewed as deducible from and related to this original compact.8 The first mention of covenant in the Scripture in Genesis 6:18 is a starting point of salvation by assuring Noah of much more than his escape with his life. Noah enters into the ark not merely as a survivor but as the bearer of God’s promise for the new age.9 Noah’s story not only points back to Adam’s, it also looks

8. Ibid., 7.
forward. Noah is described in a way befitting a model Israelite: “righteous, blameless, he walks with God.” He is in covenant relationship with God by observing the Sabbath, distinguishing clean and unclean, not eating flesh with blood in it, and offering sacrifice. His offering of sacrifice, like Moses’ intercession, brings God’s blessing on others. Even Noah’s salvation in the Flood may be compared to Israel’s passage through the Red Sea; in both situations a wind from God was instrumental in their preservation.

The covenant is addressed to the one man through whom many will be saved and the content of the covenant embraces the whole company. The Flood narrative contains two different aspects. On the one hand, the catastrophic destruction shows God’s wrath against sin; and this wrath will be finally revealed at the last day on those who ignore God’s commands. But on the other hand, it offers comfort and hope that God will continue to uphold the present natural order “as long as the earth exists,” despite man’s incurable perverseness of heart. Thus the impact of the Noahic covenant on other covenants ought not to be overlooked. At times, the certainty of other covenants is anchored in the order of the nature promised in this covenant. In Jeremiah 33:20-21, God employs the unfailing regularity of the natural order as an illustration for the Davidic covenant (2 Samuel 7) and the covenant with Levi (Numbers 17; 25:10-13).

In Isaiah 54:7-10, even God’s faithfulness to Israel is found to be tied to God’s oath similar to His promise to Noah that He will never destroy the earth again with the Flood:


11. Ibid.

For a brief moment I deserted you, but with great compassion I will gather you. In overflowing anger for a moment I hid my face from you, but with everlasting love I will have compassion on you ....This is like the days of Noah to me: as I swore that the waters of Noah should no more go over the earth, so I have sworn that I will not be angry with you, and will not rebuke you. For the mountains may depart and the hills be removed, but my steadfast love shall not depart from you, and my covenant of peace shall not be removed...

Where there seems to be a lack of grounds for hope, Isaiah reminds Israel that their hope is as sure as the Word of God. God’s promise of a coming redemption should be viewed in the light of His faithfulness in keeping His covenant with Noah. The Noahic narrative can be viewed as a foreshadowing of the end of the earth and the resurrection of saints—the present, evil world will experience a future destruction by fire and the faithful will be preserved by the specified salvation in Christ to inherit a regenerated earth that will never pass away (Matt. 24:30-31, 37-39; Luke 17: 26-32; 2 Thess. 1:5-9; 2 Pet. 3:6-7).\footnote{13} And “the elect covenant family going through a sea of death and coming forth from their burial chamber (Isa. 26:19-21) is a pledge that the redeemed will be brought through the cataclysm of the final judgment.”\footnote{14}

### Aspects of the covenant

#### Ecological

The first creation came to an abrupt end by an all-consuming flood. In Genesis 6:11-13, we read:

Now the earth was corrupt in God’s sight, and the earth was filled with violence. And God saw the earth, and behold, it was corrupt, for all flesh had corrupted their ways on the earth. And God said to Noah, “I have determined to make an end of all

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\footnote{13}{Bruce K. Walke with Cathi J Fredricks, *Genesis: A commentary* (Grand Rapids, MI: Zondervan, 2001), 151-152.}

\footnote{14}{Ibid., 152.}
flesh, for the earth is filled with violence through them. Behold, I will destroy them with the earth. (Emphasis added)

The reason that God is going to destroy humans and the earth has been repeatedly stated as related to “corrupt[ion]” and “violence.” “Was corrupt” could be translated as “had become corrupt.” But what is meant by “corrupt[ion]” and “violence” in reference to the “earth”? We are only told that the earth was corrupt and full of violence without further details. Sharp gives a brief examination of these terms and proposes a reason for the divine decision to destroy human with the earth. In his word study, the root for the word ‘corrupt’ Šḥt implies “ruining,” “spoiling,” “marring,” that is, rendering something unusable for its intended purpose. In respect to living beings, whether human or animal, the term implies the taking of life. When this term refers to objects, such as cities, fields, trees ... etc., the meaning is that they are reduced to a state in which they are no longer capable of fulfilling their intended purpose. In Genesis 6:11, one finds the first use of the verb, marred or spoiled, in conjunction with the noun, land or earth. In its context, the meaning is that the land/earth will be or has been destroyed and is rendered useless and unproductive. The verb in Genesis 6:13: “Behold I will destroy them” is another form of the same verb used for “corrupted.” Hamilton considers this as a deliberate choice of the word and renders 6:11-12 as “gone to ruin was the earth ... indeed, it had gone to ruin ... all flesh had ruined its way ... I will ruin them.”

15. Walke, Commentary, 134.
17. Ibid., 310 fnts 23, 24.
destroying already.\textsuperscript{19} According to the text, not only was the earth ruined, but this occurred because humankind “had corrupted their way on the earth” (Gen. 6:12). Here the meaning of this term indicates the destruction of the interior attitude that directs one’s actions toward a right end.\textsuperscript{20} Therefore, there is an association of mankind’s being corrupt and the earth being corrupt. Man’s corrupt inner drive leads to actions that is destructive of his relationship with God, self, and the earth.

The root for the word “violence” ḥms implies “wronging,” “doing violence,” or “treating violently.”\textsuperscript{21} The nominal form, ḥamas, occurs twice in the text (Gen. 6:11, 13), and the usual recipient of violence (ḥamas) is a human being, either an individual or an enemy people. There is occasion that the object of violence is the physical environment shown in Habakkuk 2:17. In this text, Habakkuk describes Israel’s God chastising a foreign ruler for the violence done to Lebanon, the earth, cities, and their inhabitants:

The violence done to Lebanon will overwhelm you, as will the destruction of the beasts that terrified them, for the blood of man and violence to the earth, to cities and all who dwell in them. (Hab. 2:17).

Therefore, violence can be understood not merely as exploitive oppression of human beings or violence against them, but also the malicious destruction and ruination of the environment.\textsuperscript{22} Dumbrell states, “This is a picture of the total rupture of created relationship

\textsuperscript{19} Hamilton, 28, and Kidner, 87.
\textsuperscript{20} Sharp, 311.
\textsuperscript{21} Ibid., fnt 27.
\textsuperscript{22} Ibid., 311.
on the part of the creature.

The “violence” and “corruption” that filled the earth appears to be an indication that humankind failed in their task and responsibility to benevolently care for creation and exercise their stewardship. In Genesis 6:5, 12, “God saw” implies investigation of the facts and readiness to take action. The expression of man’s evil is both extensive and intensive: “every ... only ... continually” (Gen. 6:5). This comment refers to and reverses the favorable comment in Genesis 1:31 in which divine satisfaction with the world as created was expressed. This has resulted in the destruction of humankind along with the earth except the remnant and other living creatures.

Before constructing and entering the ark, Noah was commanded and instructed, besides the specification of the ark, to preserve every kind of birds, animals and every creeping thing of the ground according to its (their) kind(s) (mentioned 3 times, Gen. 6: 20). This is an unmistakable echo of Genesis 1:20-23, and the language of 6:19-21 indicates the continuity of all kinds of creatures through the flood. The purpose is to preserve their lives but not to use them as food. Noah is to take with him every sort of food and store it up to serve as food for him, for his family, and for all these living creatures. They indeed enter the ark with every beast, all the livestock, every creeping thing, and every bird according to its (their) kind(s) (mentioned 4 times, Gen. 7: 14). This seven-fold of “according to its (their) kind(s)” echoes the original creation in Genesis 1. “According to its (their) kind(s)” is found


24. Walke, Commentary, 118, 134. “This act of looking upon the earth also signifies that God does not bring judgment without full awareness of the situation (cf. 3:8-14; 19:21).”


27. Walke, Commentary, 137.
ten times either in God’s fiat or His act in the original creation (Gen. 1:11-12, 21, 24-25). The slight difference is in Noah’s preservation task, “according to its (their) kind(s)” is not applied but implied to vegetation, presumably the seeds of vegetation are preserved by being included in the food Noah has saved in the ark. This shows the importance of biodiversity in both God’s original creation and this new “creation.” The Creator rejoices in His work and the varieties of His creation are associated with His wisdom (Ps. 104). God pays attention to the most insignificant and there is intense involvement in the daily, seemingly inconsequential affairs of creation (Matt. 10:29-31).

The emphasis of the earthly dimensions of this covenant are shown in the repetition of the phrases “every living creature,” “every animal,” “all flesh” on earth. The references become increasingly broad and inclusive and finally in Genesis 9:13, God says, “the covenant between me and the earth.” Some have argued that the reference to earth in 9:13 should be understood as “metonymy for all creatures of the earth—man and animals.” However, the earth indeed has been “destroyed” (Gen. 9:11). And in Genesis 8:21, the LORD said, “I will never again curse the ground because of man,” indicates “the extent of judgment suffered by the earth when it was ‘laid waste’ by the great flood.” The earth should, therefore, be understood as a recipient of God’s wrath in this worldwide judgment, yet would receive divine assurances of “never again.”

28. Hamilton, 318. (His reason of such understanding is: “Between me and the earth parallels ‘between me and you, and every living being with you’ of vv 12, 15, and ‘between God and every living being’ of v 16, and ‘between me and every mortal on the earth’ of v 17.”)

Preservation

In Genesis 6:14, the ark is called a ‘chest’ rather than a ship to emphasize its main purpose of providing shelter and orderly existence for a variety of creatures. During the Flood, the Creator designed the miniature cosmos inside the Ark (Gen. 6:14-21): human beings under God’s care for creation (Gen. 6:18-19), animals submissively staying within their space (6:20), and vegetation sustaining its lords (6:21). It appears that when humans overstep their boundaries and usurp the place of God, animals likewise transgress (6:12), God must instill animals with fear and dread to keep them in their place (9:2). In the covenant with Noah after he and his household stepped out of the Ark, God gives them the same blessing and command as given to Adam. The command to “be fruitful and multiply” can be fully appreciated when understood in the context of Genesis 1. The proliferation of human life is not just for the benefit of humanity survival but for the creation as a whole. There is the intentional repetition of the phrase “every living creature” eight times (9:8-17) in this covenant indicating God’s desire to preserve all species. In the Noahic covenant, all lives are not to be destroyed, but to be preserved (Gen. 6:19-20; 7:1-3, 14-16; 8:17), and further in such a way that all lives may regenerate themselves (Gen. 6:19b, 20b; 7:3b; 8:17c). Although natural extinction will sometimes occur as a part of God’s will, this is not a human prerogative. The blessing of fruitfulness indicates that life is preserved and regenerated, (Deut. 22: 6-7), and that God sustains His creation (Ps. 145: 15-16; Matt. 6:26, 30). Humans are not called to override God’s involvement with what He has made. The responsibility to care for and preserve the creation is not abolished by the Fall. Vos summarizes three

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ordinances of the Noahic covenant: (1) the propagation of life (9:1, 7); (2) the protection of life, for both animals and humans (9:21, 4-6); and (3) the sustenance of life (9:2b-3). Four times God says, “never again” (Gen. 8:21(2x); 9:11, 15). This is the promise God makes to humanity, to the earth, and to Himself. God will preserve the earth, working out His saving plan through the subsequent covenants He will make, climaxing in the new covenant in the blood of Jesus Christ.

However, by claiming “never again ... curse the ground” (8:21) God is not lifting the curse of 3:17 but promising not to destroy the earth with the flood again (9:13; Isa. 54:9). In 3:17, “curse” renders the Hebrew ārar and signifies “to inflict an anti-blessing, disastrous misfortune (privation, not fertility, and subservience, not dominion).” In 8:21, “curse” renders the Hebrew qālal, signifying “to treat with contempt.” The gracious character of this Noahic covenant is underscored by the divine promise, despite the continuing presence of human sin deserving judgment. “Never again” is qualified by “while the earth remains” (8:22), God will providentially preserve the earth and its ecology until the final judgment (1 Pet. 3:20-21; 2 Pet. 2:5-12). Walke states, “Seedtime and harvest—allusion to 1:11-12, God guarantees the continuation of humanity until the end of history by guaranteeing its sustaining food supply.”


32. Walke, Commentary, 142.

33. Ibid.

34. Walke, Commentary, 143.
Everlasting

The promise of the Noahic covenant is the first of five divinely originated covenants in Scripture explicitly spoken as “everlasting” (Gen. 9:16). However, it is not always speaking of “time without end” or eternity. The covenants are permanent in the sense that “no other alternative arrangement to serve that purpose is envisioned.” From God’s earlier promise to Noah, “While the earth remains seedtime and harvest ...” (Gen. 8:22), it seems to imply that this covenant will continue until the earth is “destroyed” by fire (2 Pet. 3:10-11; Rev. 21:1).

Isaiah 24 paints a picture of the earth lying defiled because of sin: “for they have ... broken the everlasting covenant. Therefore a curse devours the earth ...” (24:5-6); the identity of the broken everlasting covenant in Isa. 24:5 is an issue for continual debate in Isaiah scholarship, a lack of consensus has been reached. Mason argues that the disagreement surrounding the broken everlasting covenant in Isaiah 24:5 arises from the misconception regarding the nature of the Noahic everlasting covenant which potentially impacts one’s view on this subject. Mason argues that the traditional reading of Genesis 9 treats vv. 1-17 as two distinct pericopes: a blessing section (vv. 1-7) and a covenant section (vv. 8-17). This reading would lead to the consideration of the Noahic covenant as unilateral

35. Busenitz, 186 fn57 (The other four are the Abrahamic (Gen 17:7), Priestly (Num 25:10-13), Davidic (2 Sam 23:5), and the New (Jer 32:40)).

36. Ibid., 186, fn 58.

37. Ibid., 186.


39. Mason, 179 (and the following discussion on this issue heavily relies on this paper).
and everlasting covenant. Mason rebukes the separation of the stipulations of 9:1-7 from the eternal covenant of 9:8-17 and proposes a “new” reading of Genesis 9. His “new” reading notices the literary connection of the two pericopes as an indication of the bilateral nature of the covenant, being marked off at v. 7 (“As for you ...”) and v. 9 (“As for me ...”). Thus, the pattern “as for me/as for you” in Genesis 9 marks out dual responsibilities in the covenant. Also, humanity’s authority and dominion over the animal kingdom are described in vv. 2-3 as “into your hands they are delivered” (v. 2) and “I give you everything” (v. 3). The language of “fear and dread” and “to deliver into [someone’s] hand” could be read as part of the language of war. In the Pentateuch these terms are used to describe Israel’s enemies. Some have noted that animals in Genesis 9 serve as a metaphor for the future Israel-nations relationship; even if this is so, animals are not solely a metaphor for international enemies. According to Mason, Genesis 9:1-7 is viewed as the human side of the bilateral covenant: God promises never to destroy the earth again because He has implemented a way to account for the enmity in the human-human, and human-animal, relationship. God’s side of the covenant is essentially fulfilled according to the integrity of His word, but cosmic consequences arise when humankind fails on its part by breaking the covenant. Mason’s interpretation of such conditional features of Noahic covenant is used as

40. Mason, 180.
41. Ibid., 182-184.
42. Ibid., 186.
43. Ibid., 186-187.
44. For example, it is the Egyptians who grew to dread the Hebrew people who were fruitful and multiplied (Exod 1:7-12) and it is the Moabites who were overcome with fear and dread because of Israel had grown so numerous (Num 22:3-6).
the context of Isaiah 24. The commands of Genesis 9:1-7 and eternal covenant violation in Isaiah are connected.\(^{46}\)

Isaiah 24 speaks of worldwide judgment in language and imagery that many relate to a flood-like catastrophe. The heavens and the earth are laid waste and desolate, utterly despoiled (vv. 1-4); the earth suffers from a curse (v. 6); the windows of heaven are open (v. 18); the earth staggers like a drunkard (v. 20); the Lord will punish the heavens and the earth and its inhabitants (v. 21); and few will be left (v. 6), for ‘they have transgressed laws, violated statutes, broken the everlasting covenant’ (v. 5). There are the laws and statutes of the everlasting covenant established in Gen. 9:1-7.

In order to explain how an everlasting covenant is breakable in Isaiah 24, Mason makes Genesis 9:1-7 as the “mandate” in Noahic covenant and God’s promise (9:8-17) in the everlasting covenant is contingent upon whether that “mandate” is kept. However, the Noahic covenant is indeed found to be universal,\(^ {47} \) everlasting,\(^ {48} \) and unconditional.\(^ {49} \) In what sense then is an everlasting covenant breakable? Take Davidic covenant for an example, Solomon’s covenant treachery that led to the dissolution of the Davidic empire should not be viewed as failure of the covenant. The “breaking” of the covenant refers to a violation or transgression of the covenant commandment and therefore invalidation of the covenant benefits.

The message of the prophets to Israel and Judah was that their covenant with God was broken because of the sins of the people. The exile showed that one should not

\(^{46}\) Mason, 196.

\(^{47}\) The Noahic covenant is made not only with Noah and his seed but also with every living creature; Gen. 9:9-10.

\(^{48}\) The Noahic covenant is said that “never again shall all flesh to cut off by the waters of the flood, and never again shall there be a flood to destroy the earth”; Gen. 9:11.

\(^{49}\) It involves no commandment whose fulfillment or obedience is required for the promise of the stability of nature to be fulfilled.
underestimate human responsibility. Young points out that Isaiah is using the language characteristic of Mosaic legislation to describe the universal transgression of mankind. Thus a curse comes from God as the consequence of the transgression of His laws, it is however, not limited to the Israelites, but inasmuch as the inhabitants of the entire earth have transgressed, affects the entire world. Can the present ecological crisis be interpreted as a similar example of human transgression bringing about the destruction God did not want to happen again?

Redemptive

In Genesis 7:19-23, the key word “all/every (kol)” translated as “all, entire, every, and everything” (7:19[2x], 21[3x], 22[2x], 23) denotes the all-encompassing devastation and death inflicted by the flood. Just as v 20 summarizes the main statement of v 19, v 23 summarizes vv. 21-22, and the repetition intensifies the contrast between all flesh ... died and Only Noah ... was left. Hamilton further explains:

The contrast between the spared and the condemned is brought out even more in this verse by the use of two Niphals ("they were washed away", and "he was left"). The use of two passive forms of the verb to describe the fate both of the ungodly and of the righteous Noah suggests strongly that it is Yahweh’s action which controls eternal destiny. Noah does not survive this catastrophe by his own cunning or strength. He is saved because he is left behind, or left over by Yahweh.


51. Ibid., 159.

52. Walke, Commentary, 140.

53. Hamilton, 297.

54. Ibid.
As almost a second Adam (9:1) Noah steps into a “new” world washed clean by judgment, and the remarkable deliverance in the ark is seen as a mere preliminary to salvation proper, which is a new creation.\textsuperscript{55} The New Testament sees the flood and the rite of baptism as “twin expressions” of this reality (1 Pet. 3:18-22) of the provision of a way through death into life.\textsuperscript{56} Since the flood had a destructive effect, what does Peter mean when he says that eight persons were saved “through water”? After going through the waters of the flood for more than one year, they came out of the ark realizing that they had been saved from being drowned. Peter considers Noah’s deliverance through the waters of the flood a prefiguration and type of the saving event baptism symbolizes. He cannot mean that the baptism is a symbol of the waters of the flood. He is indicating likeness and correspondence,\textsuperscript{57} as the flood waters cleansed the earth of man’s wickedness, so the water of baptism indicates man’s cleansing from sin. Also, as the flood separated Noah and his family from the wicked world of their days, so baptism separates believers from the evil world of our days. In both the Old and New Testaments, sins are “washed away” (for example: Ps. 51:2; Ezek. 36:25; Acts 22:16; Titus 3:5).\textsuperscript{58} Baptism is a symbol for cleansing the believer from sin, but Scriptural teaching never indicates that baptismal water saves a person. A believer is saved because of Christ’s atoning death on the cross and His resurrection from the grave (Rom. 6:4). Besides the symbolic cleansing effect of water, the theological significance of water is its role as a medium through which one enters from a world being judged to a world being blessed. The

\begin{itemize}
\item \textsuperscript{55} Kidner, 92.
\item \textsuperscript{56} Ibid., 93.
\item \textsuperscript{57} Simon J. Kistemaker, \textit{James, Epistles of John, Peter, and Jude} in \textit{New Testament Commentary} (Grand Rapids: Baker Books, 1996), 147.
\item \textsuperscript{58} Ibid.
\end{itemize}
larger context of Peter’s epistle makes it clear that he is concerned with the theological significance of the flood as the way Noah passes from a world of divine judgment to a new world blessed by God. In God’s acts to preserve the earth in this covenant, limiting His judgment by flood, He can fulfill the greater redemptive purpose. The flood is God’s tool for both judgment and salvation!

A thematic parallel between the picture of God’s calling Noah out of the ark (Gen. 8:15-20; 9:1-9) and God’s calling of Abraham (12:1-7) is observed:59 (1) Then God said to Noah(8:15)/The Lord had said to Abram (12:1); (2) Come out from the ark (8:16)/Leave your country (12:1); (3) So Noah came out (8:18)/ So Abram left (12:4); (4) Then Noah built an altar to the LORD (8:20)/So [Abram] built an altar there to the LORD (12:7); (5) Then God blessed Noah (9:1)/ “And I will bless you” (12:2); (6) “Be fruitful and increase” (9:1)/”I will make you into a great nation” (12:2); (7) “I now establish my covenant with you and with your descendants” (9:9)/”To your offspring, I will give this land” (12:7).

Then some parallels of the verbal and thematic similarities are observed between Noah’s altar and Moses’ altar at Mount Sinai following the Exodus (24:4-18):60 (1) The building of the altar follows a major act of God’s salvation—God’s rescue of Noah from the Flood and God’s deliverance of the Israelites from bondage in Egypt; (2) the altar and the offering mark the establishment of a covenant with God (Gen. 9:9; Exod. 24:7); (3) the outcome of the covenant is God’s blessing (Gen. 9:1; Exod. 23:25); (4) the central provision in both covenants is protection from “beasts of the field” or “wild animals” (Gen. 9:2; Exod.


60. Ibid., 93.
23:29) and human enemies (Gen. 9:5-6; Exod. 23:22); (5) specific mention is made that the “earth” will be preserved from destruction (Gen. 9:11; Exod. 23:29); (6) in Genesis the visible “sign” of the establishment of the covenant is the rainbow in the “clouds” (9:13-17), and in Exodus the conclusion of the covenant making is marked by the appearance of the glory of God in the “cloud” (24:15) covering the mountain; (7) stipulations are given to which the people must be obedient (Gen. 9:4; Exod. 24:3).

The Noahic covenant thus provides the necessary foundation for the story of redemption: life on earth is guaranteed to continue despite of human depravity. There could be no history without the Noahic covenant, and hence no redemptive history.

Broader Aspects of this Important Covenant

True Relationship

Schaeffer reminds us everything is created by the personal-infinite God. On the side of the infinite there is a chasm between the Creator and all created things. Since man is created in God’s own image; on the side of personality, there is a chasm between man (personal) and the rest of the creation (impersonal). Thus we are separated from the rest of creation because we are made in the image of God, yet at the same time we are united to the rest of the creation because both nature and man (finite) are created by the infinite God. Thus, Genesis establishes the proper relation between God-man-the rest of the creation and Genesis denies the pantheism and naturalism approaches for environmental ethics.

61. Chalmers, 209.

God’s blessing on mankind (Gen. 1:28) is similar to that pronounced on the animals (Gen. 1:22): both man and animals are to “be fruitful and multiply.” But in v. 22 God simply gives a command, while in v. 28 “and God said to them” was added. This draws attention to the interpersonal relationship between God and man. Furthermore, man is told to “subdue and rule” the earth and its animal inhabitants, thereby fulfilling his role as God’s image-bearer on earth.

By parallelism and reiteration of the original covenant with Adam, the Noahic covenant thus re-establishes/affirms the true relationship among God, humans and the rest of the creation. Each human being is accountable to God to care for creation and at the same time is also part of the creation. The teaching that the nature of the created order is interrelationship between God, humans, and the earth, is consistent with the biblical worldview. Even after the Fall, God continues as Creator and Sustainer. Human beings and the earth continue to be under His care. Humans are both dependent on God for life and redemption, and on earth for sustaining life. The earth and all its creatures depend on humans for their wellbeing and survival. On the one hand, when the distinction between Creator and human and the rest of creation is blurred, a pantheistic view arises leading to all sorts of idol worship and the created order is in chaos. On the other hand, when people are blind to God’s concern for the earth and all its creatures, humans ignore their shared responsibility for creation care. This also is a distortion of the created order. Biblically, it is wrong either to elevate the environment over human beings or to emphasize human uniqueness to the point that we miss our utter earth-dependence. All people without exception depend moment-by-moment both on God and on the earth. One must see the interdependence built into God’s order.
Since this interdependence is covenant-based, earth’s abundance is not just “raw materials” for industry. It ought not to be treated as just “natural resources” or “real estate.” The fruit of the earth ought not to be treated as just “commodities.” It is God’s good, morally valued creation—a partner in a covenant pact with God that still holds, under humans as the covenant representative. Since God is in covenant with the earth, the act of failing to care for the earth is, in a sense, equivalent to sinning against God by breaking the covenant.

Reminder of God’s Concern

The act of God “see[ing]” in Genesis 9:16 stands in contrast to the evil that God “saw” in 6:12. God’s being sorry and grievous that He had made man on the earth cannot be understood as only toward humans, but should also be understood toward the corruption of the whole earth caused by humans. The Noahic covenant reminds us of the concern God has for all living creatures.

It would have been sufficient for Noah and his offspring with God’s promise about no more destroying flood. But to that promise God appends a more obvious covenant statement and to that covenant statement He attaches a sign, a rainbow in the sky. Hamilton identifies three speeches God makes in Genesis 9:8-17. The first is the announcement of the covenant (9:8-11), the second focuses on the sign of the covenant (9:12-16), and the last is a brief recapitulation of the second (9:17). Three times, different forms of the verb establish, qûm, are used in connection with the covenant or the sign of the covenant. The interesting progression is observed: from what God is on the verge of doing (v.9), to what He

63. Walke, Commentary, 147.

64. Hamilton, The Book of Genesis Chapters 1-17, 319.
will do (v.11), and to what He has done (v. 17). Repetition with variation is very characteristic of this passage regarding this sign of rainbow:

V 12: “between me and you and every living creature that is with you”
V 13: “between me and the earth”
V 15: “between me and you and every living creature of all flesh”
V 16: “between God and every living creature of all flesh that is on the earth”
V 17: “between me and all flesh which is on the earth”

Why is such repetition necessary? Most likely, the slight variation to avoid mere mechanical repetition indicates the author’s purpose of emphasis.

He wants to hammer home the goal of the narrative as He sees it and, as it were by successive strokes, allow it to reverberate like the chimes of a tower clock as they continue to echo and re-echo.

There is much discussion about the meaning of “rainbow” or “bow.” The meaning of the rainbow at the end of a flood has the simple and obvious meaning of a natural phenomenon after rain or a thunderstorm; while the bow has nothing to do with the image of God as a warrior carrying a bow. Although Old Testament contains abundant evidence of Yahweh being depicted as a warrior winning battles of cosmic proportions with the bow, the association with the Ancient Near East myth does not fit the anti-idolatry polemic manifested in the Pentateuch. It is convincing to understand the “bow” in 9:12-17 as a rainbow with

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67. Ibid., 473.

three considerations in its favor: (1) the use of the phrase “in the cloud(s) with “bow” argues for a special “metaphorical” use of “bow” meaning something as, “the bow-shaped object seen in the clouds”; (2) a rainbow follows and signals the end of the rain; (3) the only other place to qualify “bow” with the phrase “in the cloud(s)” is Ezekiel 1:28 which seems to refer to a rainbow because it is further qualified by the phrase “on the day of rain.” Further, “the cloud(s)” articulated in 9:12-17 (four times) refers to the theophanic cloud signaling God’s presence. This association of rainbow with theophanic cloud suggests a deeper theological meaning of the covenant sign.

However, ordinarily a rainbow appears following the rain and is a sign of its diminution. How then does a literal rainbow help God remember until after He had already sent another flood? Also, rainbows are usually seen against the backdrop of a clear sky, not in the clouds. As the sign of rainbow is for God to remember, so shall it be for God to see. In 9: 14-15 the promise is not that a rainbow will be seen in every cloud, but that when it is seen, God will remember His covenant. Obviously God does not need a reminder; Walke explains this reminder to God as: “God in His transcendence is omniscient but in His immanence He involves Himself with the affairs of earth.” Could it be with such emphasis, after all, is to remind us of God’s concern for His creation?

70. Ibid., 254.
71. Walke, Commentary, 146.
Eschatological Dimension of the Noahic Covenant

Following the worldwide flood in Genesis 7, God makes a covenant with Noah. This covenant secures the stability of nature so that humanity would not have to fear annihilation as they pursue God's plan for the world. In Genesis 8:22, God says that the seasons, day, and night would continue “while the earth remains.” By this promise, He assures the faithful “seed of the woman” that they would have the natural environment necessary to achieve God's goal for them. The ground, although cursed through the Fall, would not prevail against them. And in fact, the stability granted through Noah's covenant would continue until the goal of history has been reached.

The simple brevity of 6:8 (only “Noah found favor in the eyes of the LORD”) is extremely telling after the sweeping terms of 6:7; it shows God’s characteristic way with evil: to meet it not with half-measures but with the simultaneous extremes of judgment and salvation. The fact that all life is bound together is made equally plain, with man’s fellow creatures sharing his doom and, as the story develops, his deliverance—a theme taken further in Romans 8:19-21.\textsuperscript{72}

God does not surrender His purpose in creation to fill the earth with His image-bearers who reflect His glory in faith and obedience. The flood of judgment does not eradicate sin and the covenant of grace does not guarantee righteousness. The deliverance of “the righteous and blameless” Noah (Gen. 6:9) in his days from the Flood anticipates the eschatological deliverance of the righteous from the final judgment of God. On the contrary, the destruction of the violent and corrupt (6:11) gives a picture of God’s eschatological judgment on sinners. The New Testament writers see the flood as a foreshadowing of the

\textsuperscript{72} Kidner, 86.
final judgment with fire (2 Pet. 3:5-7) and the ark as a foreshadowing of final salvation (1 Pet. 3:20-21). The days of Noah serve as a type of the last days before the coming of the Son of Man (Matt. 24:34ff). It seems that the story of Noah and the flood is incomplete in itself. God’s wrath toward sin remains and no remedy is found.

How may God achieve His purpose? The clue is found in Genesis 8:20-21, “Then Noah built an altar to the LORD and took some of every clean animal and some of every clean bird and offered burnt offerings on the altar. And when the LORD smelled the pleasing aroma, the LORD said in his heart, ‘I will never again curse the ground because of man ....’” This too is a foreshadowing that God will find remedy for sin in another great sacrifice, namely, the sacrifice of His Son.

The flood narrative also provides an anticipation of the eschatological “destruction” and renewal of creation.73 It seems that Peter suggests that on the day of final judgment the earth will be “destroyed” by fire just like it had been “destroyed” by the Flood in Noah’s time. However, this does not imply that the earth will completely be annihilated; in any case, the Flood does not annihilate the earth. In 2 Peter, the Day of Judgment is pictured as a smelting process from which the purified world will emerge.74 Nonetheless, it indeed points to the fact that “the renewal of creation will involve a cataclysmic change or transition” parallel to the Flood.75 Romans 8:19-21 also offers supports for the eschatological

73. Chalmers, 215.


75. Chalmers, 215.
First, creation has been “subjected to futility” and is in “bondage to decay” (Rom. 8:20-21), the background being the curse of the ground in Genesis 3:17-19. Creation has been unable to attain the purpose for which it was created due to human sin.

Second, if creation has suffered the consequences of human sin, it will also enjoy the fruits of human deliverance. Creation’s “bondage to decay” will end when believers are glorified. Therefore, nature has a future within God’s plan. Finally, the created world is included along with the world of human beings in the reversal of the conditions of the Fall. The glory that humans will experience involves bodily resurrection which would require an appropriate environment for that embodiment. As Moo puts it:77

The importance of the natural world in the NT is indirectly, but powerfully, supported by the central “material” doctrines of incarnation and resurrection. Jesus’ resurrection is the “first fruits,” the down payment and guarantee of the future and eternal material existence not only of Christians, but also, as Rev. 3:14 perhaps hints, of the entire cosmos.

Wolters points out that the “three worlds”78 Peter speaks of in 2 Peter 3 are actually the same world in three periods in history, marked by two cosmic crises: judgment by the water in the Flood and the judgment by fire on the Day.79 Thus, the earth is included as the recipient of Noahic covenant with eschatological significance.

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77. Moo, 482-483.

78. (1) the world before the flood (“the world that then existed,” 3:6); (2) the present world between the flood and the Day of the Lord (“the heavens and earth that now exist,” 3:7); and (3) a future world after the Day (“the new heavens and new earth,” 3:13).

79. Wolters, 408.
Reappearance of the Rainbow

The sign of the Noahic covenant is like the later sign of circumcision; it was the seal (Rom. 4:11) of an accomplished fact. The difference, however, is that man for a moment could not think to procure it.\textsuperscript{80} The obvious glory of the rainbow, however, against the gloom of the cloud, seems enough to make it a token of grace, even without the reflection that it arises from the conjunction of sun and storm, as of mercy and judgment. Ezekiel begins his prophecy with a description of an awesome appearance of God, surrounded by radiance like the rainbow “in the cloud on the day of rain” (1:28). This is likely to allude back to Genesis 9, indicating that “God will exercise His mercy in the context of His judgment of the people for their sins.”\textsuperscript{81} A rainbow with the color of an emerald appears around God’s throne as described in Revelation 4:3; the clearest meaning of this symbolism is that it expresses God’s faithfulness in keeping His covenant forever with His people in grace and mercy.\textsuperscript{82} Then in Revelation 10:1, John is back on earth and sees a mighty angel from heaven clothed in a cloud. This time the “rainbow” is on the angel’s head, his face is like the sun and his legs are as pillars of fire. The description of this angel is similar to Jesus Christ in the book of Revelation but cannot be identified as Christ. The rainbow around his head serves as a symbol of God’s faithfulness to keep the promises of His (Noahic) covenant.

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\textsuperscript{80} Man can perform circumcision and keep the Sabbath, but cannot produce rainbow.
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God sends this angel as His messenger to communicate His sovereignty and His trustworthiness.\textsuperscript{83}

\textsuperscript{83} Kistemaker, \textit{Exposition of the Book of Revelation}, 308.
CHAPTER 5

BIBLICAL BASIS FOR A THEOLOGY OF CREATION CARE

Creation is deemed initially good because it is the work of the God who is good; it reflects Him and glorifies its Maker. Creation is good, because its Maker has declared it as such. God commits Himself to the earth and all of its living creatures. Creation is now fallen, contrary to its original state. God is still committed to this material world and one day He will restore it and we will live in a perfected creation forever. There is the biblical basis for a theology of creation care from creation itself: God creates it and it belongs to God; God delights in it and has compassion for it; together with it we belong both to God in the covenant and it is part of God’s larger plan. The Noahic covenant furthers it by emphasizing the covenant relation between the Creator, humankind, and the entire creation. The Noahic covenant not only serves as the renewal of Adamic covenant under fallen condition but also provides the framework of redemption as a new creation from an eschatological perspective. Thus Noahic covenant is crucial in redemptive history and requires ecological responsibility in both old and new heavens and earth.

Creation Belongs to God

Yahweh is the One who creates the earth, humankind, and all living creatures. Yahweh’s care for the creation which He brought forth is expressed thematically in His first response to Job in chapters 38-39. As in Genesis 1, it is clear that God’s creatures are meant
to exist, whether or not they are useful to humans, for example, God prepares home and dwelling place the mountain goat and the wild donkey (Job 39:5-6). All the earth is full of God’s creatures; the sea teems with innumerable living beings “both great and small” (Ps. 104:24-25). The mountains produce food for Behemoth and there “all the wild beasts play” (Job 40:20). God’s creatures, along with all creation, praise Him: sea monsters, fruit trees and cedars, “beasts and ... cattle, creeping things and flying birds” (Ps 148). Psalm 150:6 sums it all up: “Let everything that has breath praise the LORD!” In the first reply to Job, Yahweh refers to young ravens that “cry for God” for food (Job 38:41; Ps. 147:9). It is Yahweh who provides food for all flesh (Ps. 104:27-28; 136:25; Joel 2:21-22). If humanity has dominion, it is qualified by recognition that there is a higher dominion, that of Yahweh, which He exercises for the welfare not only of humans but also for the entire creation. In the New Testament God’s care for His creation continues. God feeds the birds of the air and garnishes the grass of the fields with lilies (Matt. 6:28-30). He does not forget a single sparrow (Lk. 12:6); sparrows and sheep are precious to God, and even more so for Jesus’ followers (Matt. 10:31; 12:12; cf. Ps. 84:5).

Both Psalms and Proverbs disclose a sense of wonder and amazement regarding the created world and life forms. Eagles, serpents, ants—especially admired for their prudence and industry (Prov. 6:6-8)—badgers, locusts, lizards, lions, cocks, and he-goats—and sometimes comparable human phenomena—are among the marvels that fascinated the sages (Prov. 30: 18f, 24-31). Something like this same sense of wonder and appreciation
encompasses Yahweh’s first speech to Job (38-39), including many of the Psalms, particularly Psalm 104.¹

Creation is called into being not merely for the benefit of human beings; it is God’s handiwork and joy. All life forms on earth exist for God, not just for humans to use or enjoy. The creatures have their own right to exist and flourish because they were created by God. They are God’s, not ours. The Bible speaks repeatedly of God’s concern for creatures of the earth. This is also a major theme of the Psalms and of Job. “O Lord, how manifold are your works! In wisdom you have made them all; the earth is full of your creatures” (Ps. 104:24). A sign of Solomon’s wisdom was that he “spoke about plant life, from the cedar of Lebanon to the hyssop that grows out of walls. He also spoke about animals and birds, reptiles and fish” (1 Kgs. 4:33).

Ultimately and always “the earth is the LORD’s and the fullness thereof, the world and those who dwell therein” (Ps. 24:1). Therefore, as Schaeffer reminds, “The value of the things is not in themselves autonomously, but that God made them—and thus they deserve to be treated with high respect.”² Thus, God’s covenant with Noah is not only made with Noah alone but with “every living creature” with him “for all future generations” (Gen. 9:8-17).

Creation and Redemption

The Toledot formula in the Book of Genesis provides a redemptive-historical way of looking at the past as a series of interrelated events. Ten occurrences of the phrase “this is


the account of” (these are the generations of) in Genesis bridges the story of creation (Gen. 1:1-2:3) with that of Israel in Egypt (Exod. 1).³ At the center of Genesis 2:4-11:26 is the lengthy Flood narrative and the covenant with creation containing God’s affirmation that, regardless of humankind’s wickedness before and after the Flood, the Creator remains faithful to His creation. From the Toledot formula, five sections are observed between 2:4-11:26 presenting three points:⁴ (1) human sinfulness before the Flood (Cain and mankind) and after the Flood (Canaan and mankind); (2) the continuity of God’s rule in judgment before the Flood (curse of Cain and the destruction of human beings) and after the Flood (curse of Cannan and the scattering of people at Babel) and His rule in grace before the Flood (for Adam and Eve [3:21]) and after the Flood (Noahic covenant and existence of the nations, languages, and territories in accordance with His will); (3) God’s purpose in establishing relations with individuals and their families before the Flood (Enoch and Noah) and after the Flood (Noah, Shem, and Abraham). God’s decree to flood the earth with water and to destroy all living creatures is related to the creation story. It is in a sense a return to the creative beginnings, as if man and animals do not exist: originally “darkness was over the face of the deep, and the Spirit of God was hovering over the face of the waters” (Gen. 1:2). After the Flood, God graciously renews His blessing (9:1, 7), establishes a covenant to sustain creation through nourishment (8:22) and promises not to destroy all life in the waters of another flood (8:21; 9:8-17). The biblical flood story is set against the background of human corruption and brings out vividly God’s royal nature, justice, and grace. Men and women are left

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⁴. Ibid., 71-72.
without excuse because they are sustained every day by the grace of their Creator-King. Redemption is inseparable from creation; redemption comes so that creation can continue. Humankind’s redemption is closely bound together with redemption of creation, as Dumbrell notes:

By creating the world God committed Himself to it. Man has been set over the created order but his future cannot be considered separately from the world over which he rules. The refusal of man in Eden to submit to divine purposes will mean a disordered world, while the decision of the Deity to adhere to divine purpose and maintain relationships originally set in train by creation, will have redemptive consequences not only for man but finally for his world as well.

Genesis 9 is important both for our physical wellbeing and for our understanding of salvation. God’s earth covenant recorded in Genesis 9 opens the door to a biblically comprehensive view of salvation and thus of the mission of God, missio Dei. It is in the Noahic covenant we affirm that the creation mandate is still binding under fallen condition. Creation is not merely a stage for redemption; it is also the object of redemption.

**God’s compassion toward creation**

The story of Jonah ends with the question: “And should I not I pity Nineveh, that great city, in which there are more than 120,000 persons who do not know their right hand from their left, and also much cattle?” (Jon. 4:11). God’s concern extends beyond a particular people, Israel, to other people such as Assyria. The word “pity” is on the center of the dialogue between God and Jonah. The meaning of “pity” is associated with eyes

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5. VanGemeren, 76-77.
overflowing with tears.⁷ God’s compassion extends also to the animal world. A divine compassion is demonstrated in God’s law. When persons come upon a bird’s nest, the mother bird is not to be removed (Deut. 22:6-7); the reproduction of the species is safeguarded. The commands about the mother bird and honoring of parents (Exod. 20:12) are two commands obedience to which carries a promise of long life. The ox that is treading out the grain should be given nourishment (Deut. 25:4). And even the Sabbath rest is extended to the working animals (Deut. 5:14). Laws regulate the people not to ignore a fallen donkey or ox on the road, but they must help to lift them up (Deut. 22:4). All these details are just several examples of how He shows compassion to creation! In sum, “The LORD is good to all, and His mercy is over all that He has made” (Ps. 145:9).

In the Noahic covenant, the repetition of this phrase “every living creature” (9:10a, 10b, 12b) and its equivalents, “all life”(9:11b, 15b, 17b) and “all living creatures of every kind”(9:15a, 16b)—a total of eight times—affirms God’s passionate concern and the commitment to the preservation and care of all living species on the earth.

Hosea describes a “day” in which God will make a covenant with the beasts of the field, the birds of the heavens, and the creeping things of the ground (Hos. 2:18). At the same time, God will betroth Israel to Himself forever (2:20). This bridal engagement and His covenant with those creatures will be “in righteousness and in justice, in steadfast love (hesed) and in mercy (yaham) (2:19). The transformation of the physical world is eventually prompted by His compassion.⁸ In this covenant mentioned by Hosea (2:18), similar to the

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⁸ Dumbrell, The Covenant with Noah, 30.
Noahic covenant, except the “fear and dread” brought upon animals (Gen. 9:2) will be removed.

Both belong to God in the Covenant

The covenant of creation rests upon the way God made things; God will deal with them as He made them. God will treat His creation with integrity, that is, each thing in its order, the way He made it. Creation care is indicated in the mandate of “subdue” and “have dominion over” and is a covenantal requirement.

In the Flood narrative, we see God makes a covenant with the whole creation in the Noahic covenant with Noah as its representative. This is the same role of Adam in the original covenant. The blessing periscope, designated as such because Genesis 9:1 reintroduces the creation mandate as a blessing like Genesis 1:28, is marked out by an inclusio. Verses 1 and 7 both share the imperative ‘be fruitful and multiply’ along with the call to fill the earth and multiply in it, restating the original commands of Genesis 1:26-30. The difference in these two verses resides in the language used for “to fill” the earth. Verse 1’s command to “be fruitful and multiply and fill the earth” is identical to that in Genesis 1:28; the fill used in v.7 is often used in reference to the animal kingdom ‘swarming’ the earth (Gen. 1:20-21; 7:21; 8:17). One indicates a willful action and the other out of basic instinct as God creates them. Both are called to multiply and fill the earth.


In the Noahic covenant, God not only holds animals responsible for crimes of brutality (Gen. 9:5), but also enters into a promissory arrangement with them (9:10). Animals have an honorable role in the biblical economy; they are part of the eschatological period (Isa. 9:5-8). In the 10th plague visited on Egyptian gods, judgment is directed against firstborn sons and firstborn of cattle as well (Exod. 11:5). The covenant extended to animals is proof that the validity of this covenant is not dependent upon the recipient’s acceptance of the covenant promise; animals do not accept a covenant.\(^{11}\)

Note again that the God—people—earth connection is a covenantal relationship. Its source is God’s sovereign action and initiative, his grace and mercy.

Rhythm in Creation

Genesis 8:22 is a creation statement with the qualification that it is not describing the institution of the world but its stabilization. The world is not primarily something that is there in space; it stands and exists in time, particularly in the steady, mighty rhythm portrayed in v22. The existing world is to be understood as that which exists and has achieved permanence through cataclysm; the world that now exists is the world that has been preserved. Humans became living beings because God breathed into them the breath of life (Gen. 2:7). God’s breath makes the person a being that lives by the rhythm of respiration. Moreover, the world subsists in the rhythm of day and night, summer and winter (Gen. 8:22).\(^{12}\)

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There are four pairs of words in this verse: seedtime and harvest, cold and heat, summer and winter, day and night. They seem to indicate some kind of rhythm. It is obvious that the rhythm is of two beats and that each pair describes a whole. The pair “seed time and harvest” as well as “summer and winter” describe the year as a whole, just as “day and night” describes the day of twenty-four hours. And “cold and heat” are understood as another description of the year. Thus, the first three pairs divide the year into its two halves. The first and third refer to agriculture and fruit farming, the second and fourth to the seasons and the division of the day, respectively. Three of the four pairs describe the course of the year and one the course of the day. The two basic rhythms of the year and the day which these four pairs indicate describe the subsistence of the world. Westermann further notes the significance of such rhythm:

They are closely related to the subsistence of life: every living creature exists in and requires the alternation of day and night; humans, animals and plants require the alternation of the seasons to provides the basis for an understanding of time that is rhythmically determined ... time consists in a constantly recurring rhythm. From Abraham on and then from the Exodus on, time is presented in a succession of contingent historical events which reach out in linear fashion toward a goal. But this in no way abrogates the course of cyclic time established in 8:20-22. Rather it retains its significance for everything that happens. A substantial part of the working out of God’s blessing takes place within the cycle established here; the wording out of God’s saving action takes place in contingent events.\(^\text{13}\)

Human existence is thus closely associated with and reminded by the rhythm in creation.

Extension of the Noahic Covenant

The Bible contains numerous examples of the care with which we are expected to treat the environment. Leviticus 25:1-12 speaks of the care Israel was to have for the land. Deuteronomy 25:4 and 22:6 indicate the proper care for domestic animals and a respect for

\(^{13}\) Westermann, 458.
wildlife. In Isaiah 5:8-10 the Lord judges those who have misused the land. Job 38:25-28 and Psalm 104:27-30 speak of God’s nurture and care for His creation. Psalm 104 tells us that certain places were made with certain animals in mind. And Jesus spoke on two occasions of how much the Father cared for even the smallest sparrow (Matt. 6:26; 10:29). How can we ignore this?

As Christians we have a responsibility to the earth that exceeds that of unredeemed people. We are the only ones who are rightly related to the Creator and we should be showing others the way to environmental responsibility.

Creation as Covenant Witness

The Noahic covenant is redemptive and preservative, the dominion mandate of the original covenant is still included. The creation is sustained by providence and the divine promise; humankind thus can continue to pursue its callings and activities on the stage. The heavens and earth continue to be the objects of human work under the Creator-human-creation order. However, creation is also playing an important role as the witness of human work on itself.14 For example, when Israel comes to the land which Yahweh promised to the patriarchs, the creation is to witness “in a comprehensive way the carrying out of the various laws and covenantal stipulations” and “the land will monitor the holiness (or lack thereof) of God’s people.”15 After giving Israel instruction of God’s law, Moses warns Israel of what would happen in their apostasy: “I call heaven and earth to witness against you today, that you will soon utterly perish from the land that you are going over the Jordan to


15. Ibid.
possess” (Deut. 4:26). As the prelude to the repetition of the Decalogue in Deuteronomy 5, the covenant witness of heaven and earth testify to the warning against any corruption comparable to the golden calf or the Baal-Peor incident (Deut. 4:25f).  

Then in Deuteronomy 30:19, Moses sets before the people life and death, good and evil, related to the dependence on the measure of obedience. Yahweh appeals to heaven and earth to urge the people to choose life. Near the end of Deuteronomy 31, in the context of Joshua’s commissioning, the law has been read, and the elders and other officers have been assembled. Again, Moses calls on heaven and earth to bear witness against them of their later apostasy and idol worship (Deut. 31:28). In response, the people of Israel learn a song as a covenant response of affirmation and covenant witness (Deut. 32:1). In all cases, the covenant witnesses—heaven and earth are called with solemnity. But even when “the heavens and the earth” are described as judges of man’s sins and creation personified, it is never raised to the level of deities. The covenant witness is asked to judge in a derived sense of judgment. 

In the books of prophets a similar literary style in pressing the legal case against sinful Israel and Judah is observed. Heaven and earth are called upon to bear testimony or to hear the case against Israel as covenant violators. The book of Isaiah begins with such format: “Hear, O heavens, and give ear, O earth; for the LORD has spoken” (Isa. 1:2). Later, the nations and the earth are called to hear of the Lord’s wrath (Isa 34). Similarly, Jeremiah speaks: “Hear, O earth; behold, I am bringing disaster upon this people ...” (Jer. 6:19). Hart notes


18. Ibid., 107.
that through Jeremiah, God points to the creation as a sign of His covenant faithfulness (Jer. 33:19-26):

First He says that if mankind could break the covenant with night and day (alluding to the Noahic covenant), then God would remove David’s line (cf. 2 Sam 7). But that is impossibility. Then in stronger language He says, “If I have removed My covenant with day and night, with heaven and earth, then I will remove Israel. But see for yourselves, the creation continues. Israel will find compassion again!

In Micah both the people and creation are summoned to hear what the Lord is going to witness against Israel and Judah (Mich. 1:2). Yahweh requests the people to confess and invites the mountains to hear the indictment of the LORD (Mich. 6:1-2). When the land is defiled, it will vomit out its inhabitants (Lev. 18:25-28). God even uses the land as a tool of judgment to swallow the rebellious in the wilderness (Num. 16:32-34). How long can God tolerate our sinning against Him by defiling the earth? Actually, heaven and earth are witnesses to humanity’s obedience from the beginning to the end. Heaven and earth are created as witnesses, both for God and for man (Ps. 73:9, 11; 89:34-37; Isa. 42:5f); even the new heavens and the new earth will be witnesses (Isa. 65:17; 66:22).

Humankind often breaks his covenant with God; when the covenant is broken, creation suffers. But where can a man “hide in secret places” so that the One who fills heaven and earth cannot see him (Jer. 23:24)? In Leviticus 25, the land is supposed to be given its rest as part of the Sabbatical and Jubilee obligations. Since the land cannot observe its rest unless the active obedience of its occupants, it is humans’ responsibility to allow the land to enjoy its Sabbath rest as a covenant sign. The keeping of the Sabbath in the

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Decalogue is the commandment with the longest explanation. In Exod. 20, keeping the Sabbath is associated with the creation ordinance (Exod. 20:11) and in Deut. 5, keeping the Sabbath is associated with God’s redemptive work (Deut. 5:12-15). Sabbath keeping includes animals as well. Therefore, the Sabbath is made for man and the rest of creation including the land. If the covenant is not observed, the heavens and the earth will be as iron and brass (Lev. 26:19; Deut. 28:23). People of God are sent into exile to give the land its rest, a rest which Israel had neglected (2 Chron. 36:21; cf. Jer. 29:10). This shows how important this obligation is to give creation its rest.

The Noahic covenant is made with mankind and equally with all creation. God makes a promise that embodies all creation. It is bibliically false for Christians to have a Platonic view of nature. Together with creation, we are in the same God’s covenant. As the created being, we ought to treat the creation according to God’s rule.

God’s Larger Pan: the Renewal of Creation

The creation account of Genesis 1:1-2:4a does not end with man and the mandate given him. The seventh day as the completion of the creation shows the divine purpose of creation is God’s Sabbath in which man has been summoned to participate. This indicates that man is not its consummation but is blessed to be included in the consummation.

The climax of creation is the Sabbath of the seventh day. Only this very day is blessed and hollowed by God (Gen. 2:3). Only on this day, the phrase “there was evening and there was morning” is not mentioned! This unending Sabbath day provides the context

22. Schaeffer, 36.
in which the ideal life in the garden is to take place and be propagated in human existence. Although the noun Sabbath is not used, the verb shabat is used twice as a primary verb in Genesis 2:1-3. Wenham notes that the idea of blessing and hollowing the seventh day is to grant the day with the potential to fulfill its purpose in the divine plan and especially, setting it apart as holy is without parallel, as God’s blessing is normally restricted to animate beings. The Sabbath reminds us, among other things that the world is in God’s loving hands and will not fall into pieces even if we cease from our work. To celebrate a day of rest by the creatures is an announcement of trust in God the Creator. Life does not depend upon our fanatical activity of self-securing, but that there can be a pause in which life is given to us simply as a gift. During the Flood, God remembered the inhabitants in the ark and made a wind blow over the earth, and the waters subsided (Gen. 8:1). “Noah” sounds like the Hebrew for “rest.” Chaos was under control and shalom—peace, harmony, balance—was restored. They can enjoy the Sabbath after this “re-creation” by God. In Genesis 9:8-17, six times the text speaks of a divine covenant (vv. 9-10, 12, 13, 15, 16, 17). And this Sabbath rest is specifically mentioned to extend to animals and land. In the Mosaic Law—Sabbath keeping is important and is associated with both creation and redemption. However, this


27. Ibid., 98.

28. Although the term Sabbath is not used, this new beginning brings them back to the state of a new creation, supposedly to enjoy the Sabbath in the original creation implied in the covenant of creation.
Sabbath keeping is not an external one. The external Sabbath keeping is a reminder of a forthcoming eternal Sabbath. The author of the book of Hebrews tells us that there still remains a Sabbath rest for God’s people (Heb. 4:9-11). That is the unending Sabbath in the original creation with divine endorsement and joy of creation. This eternal Sabbath cannot be achieved by human effort, and is brought in by Jesus—the lord of the Sabbath. He will bring in the true Shalom!

Ezekiel speaks that the land, once desolate, will be “like the garden of Eden” (Ezek. 36:22-38). But this transformed creation is described in the context of changed persons and a renewed society. Remarkably Hosea speaks of a “day” in which God will “answer the heavens” and they in turn will “answer the earth” (Hos. 2:21). And Martens observes the parallel themes in this section (2:16-23) with Stanza B saying “more” than Stanza A:29

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Stanza A (Hos. 2:16-20)</th>
<th>Stanza B (Hos. 2:21-23)</th>
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<tr>
<td>A focus on the earth (v.18)</td>
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<td>Harmony among earth’s creatures</td>
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<td>Outcome: security</td>
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<td>A reversal, a single metaphor</td>
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<td>Response: You are my husband</td>
<td>Response: You are my God</td>
</tr>
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The linkage between environment and spirituality is significant. Such linkage is seen again later in Hosea (4:1-3):

The LORD has a controversy with the inhabitants of the land. There is no faithfulness or steadfast love, and no knowledge of God in the land; there is swearing, lying, murder, stealing, and committing adultery; they break all bounds, and bloodshed follows bloodshed. Therefore the land mourns, and all who dwell in it languish, and also the beasts of the field and the birds of the heavens, and even the fish of the sea are taken away.

Creation suffers due to human sin! It seems hopelessly and helplessly in despair under the fallen condition. Yet, the hope comes in the covenant mentioned in Hosea 2:18 and promises will follow as discussed above.

The redeemer is the lord of the new creation

The Gospel according to John begins with “In the beginning” (Jn. 1:1), an obvious echo of Genesis 1:1. Moreover, Jesus’ dying cry on the cross, “It is finished” (Jn. 19:30) references back to Genesis 2:2, “on the seventh day God finished His work.” Christ’s death brings the old creation to an end and His resurrection marks the first day of a new creation. The opening scene is set outside a tomb in a garden as Mary Magdalene meets the risen Christ “supposing Him to be the gardener” (Jn. 20:15).\(^3\) In her confusion, she actually got it right! She met the Gardener, the King of the New Creation!\(^3\) Adam was appointed by God to be the gardener, but he failed in a garden. A new Adam—Noah—also fails as a gardener by drunkenness in a vineyard garden. Only when the true Gardener comes, God’s purpose in His original creation for the Garden can be accomplished in the new creation.

In the New Testament, Jesus comes announcing the Kingdom of God (Mark 1:15). He is inaugurating the Kingdom of God with His ministry. His coming does not merely

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transform individual persons. The coming of the Kingdom also brings “a change in the natural order.” The acts of Jesus restraining the storm (Mark 4:35-41) or transforming water into wine at the wedding of Canaan (Jn. 2:1-12) are not simply signs showing who Jesus is, but also things to come. The old creation will not be abolished but will be delivered. VanGemeren comments on the unity of creation and redemption under Christ:

The plan of God the Father involves Jesus the Son as the cosmic Redeemer (Col. 1), by whom all things will be restored to himself. The Christological focus provides a sharp contrast to concepts of order, power, faithfulness, and goodness because God did not spare his Son for the sake of the redemption of humanity and creation.... The biblical teaching of God’s rule established in creation correlates with God’s involvement in redemption. Creation anticipates a telos, or end. The God who freely, graciously, and powerfully rules creation has a goal: the new creation in his Son Jesus Christ (Gal. 6:15).

If anyone is in Christ, he is a new creation (2 Cor. 5:17). Christ is the Lord over creation, the one in whom the new creation comes into being, and the one for whom the new creation is made. While the image-bearers fail to accomplish what God has planned for them, Christ is the image of the invisible God. He also is the pattern of a new humanity—“not a discontinuous humanity, but one that is a restoration to the purpose for which God created it.”

When Paul speaks of creation as a whole groaning in labor pains and longing for the revelation of God’s long awaited, supreme act of restoration, he is alluding to God’s creation as a whole will one day be renewed (Rom. 8:21-23). For Jesus, to rule is to serve. To

32. Martens, 32-33.
33. VanGemeren, 62.
35. Chalmers, 214.
exercise dominion is to suffer, if necessary, for the good of the other. There is no question of domination, exploitation, misuse. We are to serve and protect the garden that is creation; dominion must be defined in terms of service. Environmental crisis requests us to repent that we have failed this mandate and are accountable to God.

Consummation as the Renewal of the Creation

Moving forward to the end, “I saw the holy city, new Jerusalem, coming down out of heaven from God ....” (Rev. 21:2). Our destiny is not an ethereal disembodied existence in heaven, but the life of the resurrected and glorified body living in the city that is coming down from heaven to earth.\(^{36}\) The goodness of the old creation, tainted by human sin is reaffirmed by the ‘betterness’ of the recreated new earth. In Revelation 22:1-3, we see a richly ornamented city: “the river of the water of life, bright as crystal, flowing from the throne of God and of the Lamb through the middle of the street of the city .... The leaves of the tree were for the healing of the nations ....” We see the imagery of the Garden of Eden: in particular the river of life (Gen. 2:10-14) and the tree of life (Gen. 2:9 and 3:22). We see the garden in the beginning now becomes a city, but it is neither a bare city with buildings and walls nor a garden by itself, it is a garden–city! The order and lavish ornamentation of the city and its buildings can be seen as a testimony to humanity’s capacity to make and construct beauty; while the garden imagery shows life and healing retained.

When we read the ‘future’ back to the beginning, Adam was called not only a gardener but also a builder. Therefore an environmental ethics based on Scripture does not deny the progressive development by human effort including scientific and technological

\(^{36}\) Rev. 21:2, 10; 1Cor. 15.
development, as the whole story by God’s purpose is from a garden (Genesis) to a garden-
city (Revelation).

Banvick rightly points out that according to Scripture, the present world will neither
continue forever nor will it be destroyed and replaced by a totally new one. Old
Testament passages (e.g. Ps. 102:26; Isa. 34:4; 51:6,16; 65:17; 66:22) describe in very
graphic terms the change that will set in after the judgment does not imply the destruction of
the substance of the world. The perishing of heaven and earth (Ps. 102:26) does not
communicate an absolute destruction of substance, but is explained by the fact that it will
wear out like a garment. And the Hebrew word “create” (bara) referred to the new heaven
and the new earth (Isa. 65:17) does not always mean creating something out of nothing but
denotes a divine activity by which God brings forth something new from the old (Isa. 41:20;
43:7; 54:16; 57:18). Similarly, the expressions in the New Testament that heaven and earth
will pass away (e.g. Matt. 5:18; 24:35; Rev. 21:1), perish and wear out like clothing (Heb.
1:11), dissolve (2 Pet. 3:10), be burned with fire (2 Pet. 3:10), and be changed (Heb.1:12), do
not imply a destruction of substance. Just as when God says He is going to destroy the earth
in Noah’s days, the flood does not make everything disappear, the earth remains after the
flood but is washed anew. God proclaims, “I am making all things new!” in Revelation 21:5.
He does not proclaim “I am making new things.” The language suggests renewal, not
destruction and recreation. The final chapter of the Bible depicts a river free from pollution,
pure, unadulterated, and clear as crystal. The tree of life yields its fruit every month. “The
revamping of the natural order will be so drastic that in the future time of transformation

night and darkness will not exist (Rev. 22:1-5). When God’s redemption plan reaches fulfillment, it will include a transformation of the earth, a return to the Garden of Eden.

In the larger sweep of the biblical narrative, the Noahic Covenant is foundational for the new heavens and earth that Scripture promises. The New Creation is not a second creation *ex nihilo*. It is the restoration and enhanced flourishing of the original creation. Christ’s work on the cross has begun a new humanity, and alongside of this new humanity—and maybe in consequence of it—a renewed order of creation itself!

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38. Martens, 33.
CHAPTER 6

IMPLICATION AND CONCLUSION

While people today are impressed by the newest technological gadgets and are eager to acquire them before others, they consider they are enjoying the result of unprecedented scientific knowledge; yet at the same time, they are also experiencing the unprecedented degradation of the earth. DeWitt summarizes seven potential degradations of creation by human activity: 1

1. alteration of the earth’s energy exchange with the sun resulting in global warming and destruction of the earth’s protective ozone shield;
2. land degradation that reduces available land for creatures and crops and land destruction by erosion, salinization, and desertification;
3. water quality degradation that defiles ground waters, lakes, rivers, and oceans;
4. deforestation that each year removes huge areas of primary forests and degrades an equal amount by overuse;
5. species extinction that several species of plants and animals are eliminated from the earth daily;
6. waste generation and global toxification;
7. human and cultural degradation that threatens and eliminates long-standing human communities sustainably and cooperatively living with creation, together with the loss of long-standing garden varieties of food plants. All these crises of creation have a single origin: human actions and behavior out of arrogance, ignorance, greed.

or a combination thereof.\textsuperscript{2} In sum, they are caused by human sin or lack of awareness. As indicated in Genesis 9, the corruption and violence of the earth is caused by and closely associated with human corruption and violence. And as the society ‘progresses’ and technology ‘develops,’ many environmental issues turn from local to global. Human technological development has overcome the limitation by natural rhythms: seedtime/harvest, cold/heat, summer/winter, and day/night.\textsuperscript{3} Man thinks he has power over Nature, but Lewis indicates, “What we call Man’s power over Nature turns out to be a power exercised by some men over other men with Nature as its instrument.”\textsuperscript{4} The ecological crises have stimulated lot of reflections, this study only focuses on the Christian view and narrows on the implications from the Noahic covenant.

Although man is still called the image of God after the Fall (Gen. 9:6), he is not a co-creator. His power is limited, as this becomes apparent in the story of the tower of Babel in Genesis 11. Does man really have the wisdom and capability to care for God’s creation? Not only are we short of Adam’s tremendous wisdom in naming all creatures, but we also lack the wisdom of Noah in obedience to build the ark and preserve all living creatures.\textsuperscript{5} Even though we might not need wisdom about creation to the extent of Solomon (1 Kings 4:33-34), don’t we need to be humble to learn/understand about creation before subduing and ruling over it?

\begin{itemize}
\item[2.] Dewitt, 101.
\item[3.] With the use of lighting, air-conditioning/heating, green house and other agricultural devices, man can live beyond the limitation by the natural rhythms.
\item[5.] We might have the capability to follow the specification given by God to build the ark but not necessarily have the wisdom to obey God for its use, i.e. we might use it for other purposes instead of preserving all living beings.
\end{itemize}
As humans gradually multiplied and settled down to live as separate peoples, they began to think politically, and the predominant threat became political, i.e. there was danger to their existence as a people and as a nation. The focus is mainly in the political realm; damage and violence toward earth due to violent wars are ignored. Along with the casualty of wars and natural disasters, the earth itself is also the victim. The possibility that the whole of humankind might be destroyed recedes into the background. It is only with the apocalyptic thought/threat that the possibility of indiscriminate extermination of this world comes to perspective. Therefore, in the period when national existence is secure, the Flood narrative has no significance; even the Christian church hasn’t been able to see the relevance of the Flood narrative. Although Christians make efforts to defend the creation doctrine from Genesis, there is lack of acknowledgement that the creation and Flood are complementary to each other. Consequently, while the Creation was always an important part of the teaching of the church, the Flood had no significance at all and for practical purposes disappeared completely from the proclamation. The Flood story is mostly taught in children Sunday school classes in a cartoonish style. Sadly just as Westermann comments:

Our age cannot view an event like the flood in so remote a way as did the theologians of the 19th century. It is no longer possible to see God’s righteousness or God’s just anger at work in the world-wide disasters that we have experienced and in the almost daily news of further disasters. On the other hand, one can no longer live through these disasters without asking how God’s action is related to them or at least how God can permit them. The flood story slowly but surely lost all theological interest as the great process of destruction was blandly subordinated to the attributes of God.

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7. Ibid., 479-480.
Today, the theological significance of the Flood narrative can no longer be neglected. For those whose understanding of the world is conditioned by the natural sciences, is it meaningful to them to say that God’s actions encompass all reality—disasters included? Can one say that God’s all-encompassing actions take their origin from an assurance to preserve the world of humankind “while the earth remains”?

Another concern is that the modern tendency of reading the Bible from an environmental-friendly perspective might lead to the deification of nature. Ecology can turn into nature religion, which Israel’s prophets have been fighting against for so long. Genesis 1:26-28 is repeated in 9:1, indicating that after having been proved to be sinful, man’s special position in the covenantal relation with God does not change. What remains the same is that man is responsible to God for what he does with other creatures. How humans treat creation reflects whether he is a covenant keeper or covenant breaker. The Noahic covenant provides a foundation and necessity of human accountability for creation care even under fallen condition.

Biblical Christians are countercultural and have a different basis for understanding environmental issues. God the Creator and His everlasting earth covenant are the touchstones. The Noahic Covenant is seen as part of the larger biblical story of creation, Fall, and the redemption that comes through Jesus by the Spirit. Creation care is viewed in light of the story of Jesus—his incarnation, life, teachings, death, resurrection, reign, return, and final triumph. Jesus’ literal, physical, flesh-and-blood resurrection and the promise of our own resurrection, “the redemption of our bodies” (Rom. 8:23), not just our spirits, are the reality and confirm the everlasting existence of the physical world, though we do not know what the

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8. Westermann, 480.
renewed world is like. Studying creation and caring for it as a good servant-king for the glory of God within His created order and covenant relation are the essence of Christian environmental ethics. Creation revolves around God; therefore, the Biblical view on creation is theocentric, not anthropocentric, zoocentric, biocentric, or ecocentric.

Consummation is the renewal of the creation therefore redemption should be viewed in the context of the creation, and as the re-creation, the new creation. Under such a framework, our responsibility of creation care is part of the cultural mandate that cannot be separated from the gospel mandate. Schreiner’s conclusion in Studying Calvin’s view on creation as the theater of God’s glory:

Christians are to be active in the ordering of society, the upbuilding of the church, the combating of demons, and the study of nature, not because this world can offer salvation or fulfillment but because these activities express the glory of God within his created order.

The heavens and earth reflect God’s glory, providing the stage for His redemptive work. Creation together with mankind is in a covenantal relationship with the Creator; it not only provides the arena for mankind to express their covenant loyalty to God but also witnesses as to how mankind obeys or disobeys the covenant.

Facing more frequent and severe “natural” disasters, some Christians respond by singing the hymn, “This World Is Not My Home.” They consider this world will “pass away” or “be destroyed” and place their hope in a Platonic “heavenly” realm. Such an attitude might help them endure the temporal tribulations in this world, but this is the world we are going to spend eternity in, a renewed one, of course. When God says He is going to


10. The song writer is attributed to be Albert Brumley (1905-1977) from Arkansas.
destroy the sinful mankind with the earth (Gen. 6:13), He preserves for Himself Noah and his
family, along with all the other living creatures according to their kinds. After the earth is
“destroyed” by the Flood, the earth remains! The earth is cleansed and renewed for a fresh
start indicating the continuity between this world and the world to come! We see how
Genesis 9 illuminates the remarkable promise in Revelation 11:18, “The time for the dead to
be judged, and for rewarding your servants, the prophets and saints, and those who fear your
name, both great and small, and for destroying the destroyers of the earth.” It is the
destroyers of the earth who are to be destroyed! The old creation is not to be eradicated but
instead will be delivered. And “the lordship of Christ over creation serves to attest to his
lordship in redeeming man”¹¹ as revealed in Romans 8:18-21:

For I consider that the sufferings of this present time are not worth comparing with
the glory that is to be revealed to us. For the creation waits with eager longing for
the revealing of the sons of God. For the creation was subjected to futility, not
willingly, but because of him who subjected it, in hope that the creation itself will
be set free from its bondage to decay and obtain the freedom of the glory of the
children of God.

Bavinck thus describes the final state of glory:¹²

The state of glory (status gloriae) will be no mere restoration (restauratie) of the
state of nature (status naturae) but a re-formation that, thanks to the power of Christ,
transforms all matter into form, ... and presents the entire creation before the face of
God, brilliant in unfading splendor and blossoming in the springtime of eternal
youth.

In light of this, the new heavens and the new earth will be brought in by Christ through His
redemptive renewing work. Instead as the renewed kings and queens in His image, we sing,

“This Is My Father’s World”¹³

¹¹ H. Wayne House, “Creation and Redemption: A Study of Kingdom Interplay,” Journal of the

¹² Ibid. 769.

¹³ Written by Mathie D. Babcock (1858-1901).
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Primary


Secondary


