

Prayer

Thank You, Lord Jesus, for the joy of being able to share our faith. Thank You for others with whom we share our experiences of You; thank You for the church events at which we share what we believe; thank You for the privilege of hearing the testimony of other people's faith; and thank You for all the opportunities we have to share what we believe and everything this means to us. Lord Jesus, build us up in our faith, we pray: AMEN

Other Prayer Suggestions

Weekly Theme: Nuclear power

Nuclear power is a controversial subject, but this is why we should pray about it. Pray that God's people might be prepared to make a contribution to this important debate.

On-going prayers

- Give thanks for the food you eat and the God who gave it
- Pray for all those working to expose injustice in the world
- Pray for industries badly affected by recession

Meditation

The things of God are immeasurable and true:

His love is more precious to us than any gift we receive;
His grace is more awesome than any experience we may have;
His faithfulness is more consistent than the seasons of the earth;
His promises are more assured than any due processes of law;
His support is more steadfast than the foundations of a tower;
His healing is more complete than the circle of the globe;
His salvation is more secure than the safest of homes;
His future is more certain than an atomic clock;

And if we have problems, then it is us who must change.

Bible Study - Genesis 9:1-7

¹ God blessed Noah and his sons, and said to them, 'Be fruitful and increase in number to fulfil the earth.

² Awe and terror will fall on every animal of the earth, on every bird of the air, on everything that crawls on the ground, and on all the fish of the sea. They are placed into your hands. ³ Everything that moves and lives will be food for you; and just as I gave you green vegetation, I give you everything.

⁴ Except you must not eat meat with its life, which means to say, with its blood.

⁵ I will also demand an account of all the lifeblood you take; of all living animals, and of the life of one person at the hand of another. ⁶ Whoever sheds human blood will have their bloodshed by someone else; for God made humanity in His own image.

⁷ As for you, be fruitful and increase in number, fill the earth and become great in it.

Review

This is an extraordinary passage of scripture. The story of Noah and the Flood has come to an end, and Genesis 9 contains the 'consequences' of the whole story. Cain's murder of Abel was a sin that spread to the rest of humanity (4:26 – 6:8) through his family line (4:17-25), and eventually gave God reason to bring the Flood. Yet within the story of the Flood, God performed a second miracle of creation, perhaps, 're-creation' (8:13-22). As we read the end of chapter 8, however, it becomes obvious that what God wanted more than anything else, was a new relationship with the pinnacle of His creation, men and women.

Chapter nine begins to describe this new relationship; and it does this in two ways. Firstly, in our passage today, God deals in a new and startling way with the issue of murder and shedding blood which was a major problem for His relationship with humanity before the Flood (Gen 4:8, 4:23). Secondly, in the passage we will read tomorrow (9:8-17) He formalises the Covenant relationship with Noah and His lineage, hinted at before the Flood (6:18). This, of course, is the highlight of the chapter, containing the story of the establishment of the rainbow (9:13), and even though our passage today is strange, it all goes together.

The first verse of our passage contains the command of God, first given in Genesis 1:28, to 'be fruitful and increase in number' (9:1). The fact that it is repeated here is an important reminder to us that it is God's for people to bear children and grow in number. Today, many people question whether we have now taken this too far, because of the sheer size of the population of the world, but it is still uncertain what the significance of population size really is. This command, however, had an important part to play in the beliefs of the Christian church. Some early Christians felt that because the Lord was coming again, they should refrain from sex and procreation. Paul, however, taught that people should get on with living as God commanded, including raising families!

In verses 2 and 3, God placed all living things in fear of humanity, and granted that people could kill animals and eat the meat of living things. If you recall the first chapter of Genesis, you will remember that initially, people were only granted the right to eat vegetables (1:29), so this was a new departure. However, by equating blood with life, God placed an obligation on humanity to respect the right of life and death they have been given. This right, of course, was ultimately God's authority in this world (2:9), and this is the reason why the Old Testament insists that blood must not be eaten (9:4).

Lastly, God dealt with the issue of murder, of one life taken for another. People often think of the Ten Commandments as being the source of the commandment 'You shall not kill', but the command goes back much further, to this point in Genesis. After the 'Fall' of Adam and Eve, murder was the first 'sin' committed, and God's sanction against it reflected His deep concern at this affront to the dignity of life. The penalty was severe, and although it seems almost barbaric to us, we cannot judge the importance of it to an early time such as this; the penalty for murder was the cost of the murderer's life (9:6). This 'capital punishment' was God's ultimate sanction; but today, in an age in which Christ has died for all and the mercy of God prevails wherever His Kingdom is to be found, things have changed. It is perhaps right that now Jesus' death has taken away for penalty for sin for all people who have faith in Him, that we remove the sanction of the death penalty from our statute books.

Even though the commands of God in today's passage are about eating, blood and murder, they are intended to set limits which define the boundaries of acceptable behaviour in respect of killing things, either for food, or for murder. They are to do with life and its ultimate sacredness, as when the text talks of giving an account for all life, to God. Lastly, at the beginning and the end of the passage, the identical blessing of God is given to the

whole family line of Noah; a blessing of fruitfulness and abundance. It is a blessing that has been fulfilled, for despite the wars between people and nations and the difficulties and hazards of the natural world, people are indeed spread throughout the world.

Questions *(for use in groups)*

1. In what sense does this passage of scripture represent a 'blessing' to humanity?
2. How does this passage of scripture describe our relationship with animals today? In what ways is it different from before the Flood and why?
3. In what ways can we respect the very close relationship that exists to this day between 'blood' and 'life'?

Discipleship

Personal comment:

This is a difficult passage of scripture, but the Christian disciple should always be aware that at its heart, the Old Testament needs to be interpreted by the New. Some people, for example, quote this scripture in defence of the death penalty, without stopping to think about how we should interpret the Old with the New Testament. The Old Testament says many things from which we can learn, not just about ourselves, but also about God. Indeed, without it we would be severely compromised in our ability to understand the saving work of Jesus. It is an important part of a disciple's journey of faith to learn to handle texts from the Old Testament which cannot just be 'lifted' and applied, without considering how the rest of scripture deals with the same issues.

Ideas for discipleship programme

- *What does 'life' mean to you? What does 'life' mean to people in this world and society at large? Think about what happens to you in a day, and what issues of life and death are reflected in everyday matters – eating, being aware of the news, politics, etc. Ask the Lord to help you value life in your words and deeds.*
- *Pray about the issue of the world's population. Ask the Lord to help you understand what His will can be for such a vast number of people in this world. Discuss this if you can, with someone else.*

Final Prayer

Lord God, You are worthy of our greatest praise! We give you glory for the wonderful things You have done for us, and we can barely wait for all You have for us to do next. Give us hearts that always rejoice in Your presence, Lord God; we praise you now, and evermore, AMEN