



Feb. 18, 2018 Mk. 1: 9-15 & Gn. 9: 8-15

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Gn. 9: 8 And G-d spoke unto Noah, and to his sons with him, saying: 9 'As for Me, behold, I establish My covenant with you, and with your seed after you; 10 and with every living creature that is with you, the fowl, the cattle, and every beast of the earth with you; of all that go out of the ark, even every beast of the earth. 11 And I will establish My covenant with you; neither shall all flesh be cut off any more by the waters of the flood; neither shall there any more be a flood to destroy the earth.' 12 And G-d

said: 'This is the token of the covenant which I make between Me and you and every living creature that is with you, for perpetual generations: 13 I have set My bow in the cloud, and it shall be for a token of a covenant between Me and the earth. 14 And it shall come to pass, when I bring clouds over the earth, and the bow is seen in the cloud, 15 that I will remember My covenant, which is between Me and you and every living creature of all flesh; and the waters shall no more become a flood to destroy all flesh.

COMMENTARY:

[Noah means "rest,"](#)

God is explicitly depicted as establishing a [covenant](#) with Noah and his descendants (Genesis 9:1 - 17). These covenants anticipate the covenantal relationship between God and Israel. In the light of that primacy, there can be in normative Judaism only one definition of the evil men do, namely, rebellion against or transgression of God's covenant.

There is no autonomous realm of the ethical in covenantal religion. All offenses are ultimately made against the Lord of the covenant, as is evident from the biblical account of the covenant at Sinai. The relationships between man and man, such as the honor due to parents and prohibitions against murder, adultery, theft, and false witness, are not portrayed as expressions of an independent ethical or legal realm. Instead, they are depicted as covenantal injunctions, as, indeed, are all of the Torah's norms. The covenant and it alone legitimates the corpus of behavioral norms in Scripture.

In the light of the definition of human evil in biblical and rabbinic Judaism as breach of the covenant, natural and social misfortunes-- such as plague, famine, and war--are, as noted, interpreted as God's just and appropriate response. The justice of even the worst misfortunes meted out to those who break the covenant follows from the fact that the conditions of the relationship were spelled out explicitly in the original pact. The unremitting ethical rationalism of this system is also manifest in the fact that neither at Sinai nor at Shechem do we find even a hint of a suprahuman power, such as Satan, moving Israel to disobedience. Israel's disobedience is seen as freely chosen. The volitional element in both compliance and deviation and, hence, the offender's responsibility for the results of his conduct are stressed in Deuteronomy:

"I call heaven and earth to witness against you this day: I have put before you life and death, blessing and curse: Choose life if you and your offspring would live" (Deuteronomy 30:19; cf. Jeremiah 21:8).

Obedience to the terms of the covenant is the path of life; rejection of the covenant is ipso facto the individual's election of misfortune, unhappiness, and death. The latter cannot be seen as evil insofar as they are the just response of the offended deity. Similarly, in the case of communal disasters, the community's sufferings were understood to be misfortunes Israel called down upon itself when, at Sinai and Shechem, it bound itself by an oath to the covenant, calling upon God to punish it were it ever to prove unfaithful. As can be seen from the twenty-eighth chapter of Deuteronomy, no matter how bitter are the misfortunes visited by God upon the offender, they are regarded as no more than the offender's just deserts.

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