

# Somewhere Over the Rainbow



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

Genesis 9:8-17

---

## Somewhere Over the Rainbow

**Auntie Em** is fed up with her pesky little niece so she tells her, "Now, you just help us out today, and find yourself a place where you won't get into any trouble." "Some place where there isn't any trouble," **Dorothy** says to herself. "Do you suppose there is such a place, Toto? There must be. It's not a place you can get to by a boat or a train. It's far, far away – behind the moon – beyond the rain. Somewhere, over the rainbow, way up high. There's a land that I heard of once is a lullaby."

The **rainbow**: Caused by the reflection and refraction of the rays of the sun shining on falling rain.<sup>1</sup> The rainbow (Heb. *qeše* ; Gk. *íris*). An arc of colored bands in the sky opposite the sun produced by the double refraction and single reflection of the sun's rays by mist or rain.<sup>2</sup> It is one of the most awe inspiring sites in all of God's creation, and it has been used in many ways throughout history.

---

<sup>1</sup> M. G. Easton, *Easton's Bible Dictionary* (New York: Harper & Brothers, 1893).

<sup>2</sup> Allen C. Myers, *The Eerdmans Bible Dictionary* (Grand Rapids, MI: Eerdmans, 1987), 870.

You can find it on the top of [Mt. Everest](#) in the form of Buddhist prayer flags. You see it on [tie-dye clothing](#). It is on various [flags](#) such as the city of Cusco in Peru, or the flag of the Wu-Wo Tea Ceremony in Taiwan, or the peace flag of Greece, and homosexuals have co-opted the rainbow for their flag. You also find it on the Victory Medal and Victory Ribbon handed out for military service. The colors of the rainbow are prominent: [red](#), [orange](#), [yellow](#), [green](#), [blue](#), [indigo](#), and [violet](#). Different groups attach different meanings to the various colors in the bow. However, in each of these cases, the main idea that lies behind the use of the colors is supposed to be [peace](#), though I would suggest that in most if not all of these cases, the peace being sought is the wrong peace using the wrong means.

### Uses of the Rainbow



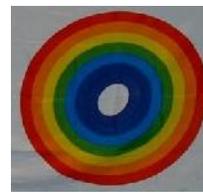
Prayer flags



Tie-dye



Flag of the city of Cusco



Wu-Wo Tea Flag



Victory Medal

From the perspective of the man on the ground, the rainbow is not just about color, though it is at least about color. It is also about the [shape](#). Sometimes you will see a rainbow that is short and looks like a small letter “r” without the point on the top left. 🌈 But the truly awe inspiring bow is when it is fully formed, a [semi circle](#) that begins far to the left on the ground, travels up in an arc, and goes back down all the way to the far right. 🌈

The idea in a fully formed rainbow is that it makes the shape of a [bridge](#). You can see this in things like the PBS kid’s show: *Reading Rainbow*, where reading becomes a [bridge to anything you can put your imagination to](#). You see it in the memorial poem called “[Rainbow Bridge](#)” which tells the reader that when they die, their [pets cross the rainbow](#) and go to a better place—where there is always food and water and warm spring weather, and that they are waiting for you to one day cross the bridge to be with them. This is about as sentimental and imaginary to me as the Leprechaun who has a pot of gold at the end of the rainbow.<sup>3</sup> But it does teach the idea that people see the bow as a bridge.

<sup>3</sup> Since we do not know exactly what happens to animals when they die, it is possible that their souls live on or it is possible that they do not. What is dangerous about the poem is that there is no word about how the pet owner may not make it to this secular view of heaven. There is nothing in the poem about God or his only begotten Son Jesus Christ.

Today we are looking at [the covenant that God made with Noah](#) after the flood. Anyone even slightly aware of this story knows that part and parcel of this covenant is the sign that God gives to Noah—the [rainbow](#). This story is extremely old, one of the oldest memories known to man. What is curious is that many old stories from around the globe, be they stories of a flood or not, have the rainbow used in them. I want to tell you about just a few of these very briefly.

First, in the Norse saga of the [Eddas](#) (both Prose and Poetic Edda), we find that there is a bridge called [Bifröst](#). This is [a burning rainbow bridge that reaches between Midgard \(the world\) and Asgard \(the realm of the gods or heaven\)](#).<sup>4</sup> [Bifröst](#) was popularized in the recent superhero movie [Thor](#). Thor meets up with [Heimdall](#), the all-seeing and all-knowing Asgardian warrior-god and the guardian of the rainbow bridge. Thor ends up fighting with his evil adopted brother, the trickster [Loki](#), and ends up destroying the bridge, thereby cutting off his connection between heaven and earth.

The movie is actually fairly faithful to the Saga's depiction of these worlds, as it shows Asgard filled with the colors of the rainbow, even as the bridge itself is the epitome of the visible spectrum. Some have speculated that the rainbow bridge here may actually be some kind of a representation of [Milky Way](#), which when viewed from the right place and time can take on the exact appearance of a rainbow. The Milky Way is full of stars, and of course, heavenly beings are identified with stars throughout the Bible.

## Rainbow Bridges and the Heavenly Realm



Asgard (Movie: Thor)



Milky Way

---

<sup>4</sup> For example *Prose Edda: GYLFAGINNING XIII*: Then said Gangleri: "What is the way to heaven from earth?" Then Hárr answered, and laughed aloud: "Now, that is not wisely asked; has it not been told thee, that the gods made a bridge from earth, to heaven, called Bifröst? Thou must have seen it; it may be that ye call it rainbow.' It is of three colors, and very strong, and made with cunning and with more magic art than other works of craftsmanship. But strong as it is, yet must it be broken, when the sons of Múspell shall go forth harrying and ride it, and swim their horses over great rivers; thus they shall proceed." Then said Gangleri: "To my thinking the gods did not build the bridge honestly, seeing that it could be broken, and they able to make it as they would." Then Hárr replied: "The gods are not deserving of reproof because of this work of skill: a good bridge is Bifröst, but nothing in this world is of such nature that it may be relied on when the sons of Múspell go a-harrying."



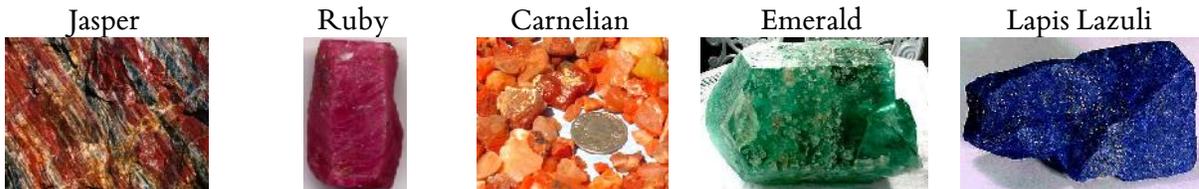
Milky Way



Rainbow Bridge, Utah

What is curious to me in all of this is how the Norse actually seem to be remembering (in my opinion, as all ancient people’s do), fragments of the truth that they once knew when the peoples of the world were all in one place. The Bible depicts the throne room of heaven this way, “Above the vault over their heads was what looked like a throne of lapis lazuli, and high above on the throne was a figure like that of a man. I saw that from what appeared to be his waist up he looked like glowing metal, as if full of fire, and that from there down he looked like fire; and brilliant light surrounded him. Like the appearance of a rainbow in the clouds on a rainy day, so was the radiance around him. This was the appearance of the likeness of the glory of the LORD” (Ezek 1:26-28 NIV). Revelation adds this description, “And the one who sat there had the appearance of jasper and ruby. A rainbow that shone like an emerald encircled the throne” (Rev 4:3 NIV).<sup>5</sup> What you end up with in these descriptions are basically the colors of the rainbow which are then explained by the actual presence of the rainbow.

**Rainbow Colors of the Heavenly Throne Room**



So the rainbow does in fact represent the heavenly realm and the place where God dwells. It is possible to see the rainbow here as a refraction of the various attributes of God. The fullness of his glory shines so brightly that no eye can penetrate it, but when refracted through a prism or raindrop or a crystal throne or sea, the visible spectrum shines in a pallet of colors. The purple or red or yellow that you focus on is just part of the Great Light that shines out as a single blinding white

<sup>5</sup> I choose the NIV here because most translations do not give “rainbow” as the English translation of Ezekiel 1:28. We will discover why later. Concerning Revelation 4:3 one dictionary says, “We must insist on an allusion to Gn. 9:13 both at 10:1 and 4:3 if we are to do full justice to the text.” Gerhard Kittel, Geoffrey W. Bromiley, and Gerhard Friedrich, eds., *Theological Dictionary of the New Testament* (Grand Rapids, MI: Eerdmans, 1964-).

color to the universe.<sup>6</sup> Let us look at one more aspect of these ancient stories of the rainbow, this time focusing on stories that actually put the bow in their flood tradition.<sup>7</sup>

The **Yurok Indians** of northern California tell this story, “The sky fell and hit the water, causing high breakers that flooded all the land. That is why one can find shells and redwood logs on the highest ridges. Two women and two men jumped into a boat when they saw the water coming, and they were the only people saved. Sky-Owner gave them a song, and many days later the water fell when they sang it. Sky-Owner sent a rainbow to tell them the water would never cover the world again.” The **Lakota** of North Dakota have this story, “After the flood, The Creating Power created four colors of people from red, white, black, and yellow mud. He created the rainbow as a sign that there would be no more great flood, but warned that he had destroyed the first world by fire because it was bad, and the second world by flood, and he would destroy this world too if people make it bad and ugly.” The Navajo use the wondrous Rainbow Bridge in Utah (see above picture) to tell of their origins after the waters of the earth subsided.

The **Masai** tribe of East Africa tell of **Tumbainot** (\*their Noah\*) who saw **four rainbows**, one in each quarter of the sky, signifying that God's wrath was over. The **Munda** of north central India talk about the snake Lurbing who is sent by God to stop the floods he sent to destroy the world. The snake held up the showers by puffing up its soul into the **shape of a rainbow**. The natives of **Hawaii** talk about **Nuu**, 13<sup>th</sup> generation from the first man, who builds an ark to escape the floods. After the flood, Nuu offers a sacrifice of a pig and coconuts to the god Kane. Kane descended on a rainbow to reproach Nuu for his mistake but **left the rainbow** as a perpetual sign of his forgiveness. In **Lithuania**, Pranzimas (the supreme god) sends water and wind to destroy the earth. After the wrath dies down, the god sends a rainbow for them to jump over the bones of the earth nine times from which spring forth the first couples after the flood.

In these stories we can see the ideas of **peace** and a **bridge** coming to the forefront. Ancient peoples remember the story and some of the important aspects of it. This should not surprise nor alarm you, since we all came from Noah. The problem is not the similarities with the Biblical stories and depictions, but the **differences**, and how they pervert the story at the vital points, thereby effectively

---

<sup>6</sup> Greg Beale writes in this regard, “Above all, the rainbow evokes thought of God’s glory, since Ezek. 1:28 metaphorically equates it with ‘the appearance of the surrounding radiance ... the appearance of the likeness of the glory of the Lord.’” G. K. Beale and D. A. Carson, *Commentary on the New Testament Use of the Old Testament* (Grand Rapids, MI; Nottingham, UK: Baker Academic; Apollos, 2007), 1100.

<sup>7</sup> <http://www.talkorigins.org/faqs/flood-myths.html#Frazer>

cutting themselves off from whatever saving truth they may have one time had when they learned the truth from our common father. This is where the Bible alone becomes our guiding light.

### **Noah's Sacrifice: Prelude to a Covenant**

With all of this as background, I am now ready to have us look at the story as we find it in the Bible. We will be looking specifically at **Genesis 9:8-17**. However, this part of the story really begins back in **8:20** when Noah, like the Hawaiian Nuu (and the fascinating linguistic similarity) offers a **sacrifice**. The sacrifice that Nuu offers seems to be a mistake, but the god forgives Nuu anyway. However, the sacrifice that Noah offers is **accepted** by God.

Not only is it accepted, but it becomes a “**pleasing aroma**.” This aroma actually soothes God’s wrath after the incredible depths of human depravity that caused him to destroy the whole world. As **Martin Luther** explains,

God, who was offended by the horrible stench of ungodliness, is now recovering. He sees this one priest [Noah] girding himself for sacrifice, in order to manifest some evidence of thankfulness and to indicate by a public act that he is not ungodly but has a God and fears Him; for it is with these matters that sacrifices are actually concerned. Just as God thus far took pleasure in destroying the human race, so now He takes pleasure and rejoices in increasing it once more. It is for our sake, therefore, that Moses uses such an expression, in order that we may gain an understanding of God’s grace and learn that He is a God who rejoices in doing good to us” (*Lectures on Genesis* 8:21).<sup>98</sup>

As such, the sacrifice is a type of the sacrifice that Noah himself looked forward to. For you see, Noah’s sacrifice was a **burnt offering** (**Gen 8:20**) that **atoned** for sin (as burnt offerings do in the OT: **Lev 1:4**). Luther’s fellow German Reformer **Johannes Brenz** explains, “[God] is pleased with Noah’s faith in the seed of the woman, in Jesus Christ, who is foreshadowed by the burnt offering.”<sup>99</sup>

What Noah had to do in making this offering was to **cut** the animal so that it died and its **blood drained** out. This idea is found in the next section, in **Genesis 9:1-7** where we learn that God gives animals to mankind to eat, but with the command that “**you shall not eat flesh with its life, that is, its blood**” (**Gen 9:5**). You see, the burnt offering was actually an offering that Noah could eat. As it says in **Deut**

---

<sup>9</sup> LW 2:117 (WA 42:345).

<sup>8</sup> John L. Thompson, Timothy George, and Scott M. Manetsch, eds., *Genesis 1–11: Old Testament*, vol. 1, Reformation Commentary on Scripture (Downers Grove, IL: IVP Academic, 2012), 283–284.

<sup>9</sup> John L. Thompson, Timothy George, and Scott M. Manetsch, eds., *Genesis 1–11: Old Testament*, vol. 1, Reformation Commentary on Scripture (Downers Grove, IL: IVP Academic, 2012), 285.

12:27, “Offer your burnt offerings, the flesh and the blood, on the altar of the LORD your God. The blood of your sacrifices shall be poured out on the altar of the LORD your God, but the flesh you may eat.” And so this section in the early part of Genesis 9 is actually directly related to the sacrifice of Noah.

### **Covenant Treaty**

But these first seven verses of Genesis 9 also serve another purpose. They are actually the **beginnings of a great covenant** that God will **reconfirm** with Noah. Covenants are extremely important in the Bible. In fact, they provide a blueprint for the basic outline and theology of redemptive history. They give us the divisions of law and gospel, the two words that teach us how to live and how to be saved.

Covenants were **ancient treaties**, usually made between high kings (suzerains) and lower kings (vassals). In any instance where God is involved in the covenant, he is to be seen through this title of “High King.” These treaties were **formal declarations of peace** between the two parties. In fact, they are sometimes called **covenants of peace** (**Num 25:12; Josh 9:15; Isa 54:10; Ezek 34:25; Heb 13:20**). We’ve seen how the rainbow is often used as a sign of peace, so this is important to keep in mind for later.

Covenants were also written out with formal elements, much like you would find with any kind of legally binding document today. There is a common order found in them. These elements include a **preamble**, **stipulations**, **blessings**, **curses**, and they involve **oaths** and are confirmed by **signs**. The Bible itself is often written as a covenant treaty. In fact, the book of Deuteronomy follows this basic pattern. It is God’s great covenant made with the nation of Israel.

The Noahic covenant after the flood also follows this same basic pattern. **Gen 9:1** gives a kind of **preamble** and **stipulations** to be followed. **Vv. 1-3** give the **blessing** from God. **Vs. 5-6** have the curse. So the first seven verses form part of the formal elements of the Noahic covenant. The part we are looking at today has the elements of the **oath** and the **sign**. This is what we will look at now.

<b>Covenantal Elements in Genesis 9:1-17</b>		
9:1	Title/Preamble	“And <i>God</i> blessed ...”
9:1b (//7), 4	Stipulations	“Be fruitful and multiply, and fill the earth” not to eat flesh with its blood
9:1-3	Blessings	“And <i>God blessed</i> ”
9:5-6	Curse	man’s blood demanded from man and beast
9:9-11a	Oath	“I establish my covenant ...”
9:12-17	Sign	rainbow and explanation of its meaning

Taken from Jeffrey J. Niehaus, “Covenant and Narrative, God and Time,” *Journal of the Evangelical Theological Society* 53, no. 3 (2010): 541-542.

## **Covenant Oath**

To make a covenant is sometimes called **swearing an oath**. For example, it says of Abraham and Abimelech, “**That place was called Beersheba, because there both of them swore an oath. So they made a covenant at Beersheba**” (Gen 21:31). Or in **Ezekiel 17:19** the LORD says, “**As I live, surely it is my oath that he despised, and my covenant that he broke.**” In our story, God is swearing an oath in the form of “**establishing my covenant**” with Noah.

It says, “**Then God said to Noah and to his sons with him**” (Gen 9:8). God is speaking. This is God’s word now coming, even as it did in the first covenant of works in Genesis 1-2. It is his **covenantal word**. “**Behold, I establish my covenant with you and your offspring after you, and with every living creature that is with you, the birds, the livestock, and every beast of the earth with you, as many as came out of the ark; it is for every beast of the earth**” (Gen 9:9-10). This tells us the recipients of the covenantal oath. The Noahic covenant is **not merely for Noah** and his sons, but **even the animals** that came off the ark will benefit from this oath of God.

From this we should be able to tell that Noah’s covenant is not firstly about salvation, as the new covenant is. It is a covenant of **common grace**, as **vs. 11** explains, “**I establish my covenant with you, that never again shall all flesh be cut off by the waters of the flood, and never again shall there be a flood to destroy the earth.**” There is no promise here to save anyone from hell **fire**. There is a promise not to destroy the whole earth again with **water**.

In thinking about this, it should be noted that **without common grace, saving grace would not be possible**. If God did not show common grace to creation, it would mean that he would have to destroy it, for that is what it deserves. We see this at the beginning of the flood story where it points out, “**every thought of man is only evil all the time,**” and even **the beasts and other creatures had defiled themselves and corrupted their ways**. Common grace allows God to show pity to the world, and this pity comes to man through the sacrifice of Noah, which itself foreshadows the sacrifice of Christ.

In other words, God can’t even show even common **grace** because he “feels” like it. Grace of any sort under these kinds of circumstances still has to see **justice** met. Christ’s death on the cross finds the fullness of God’s justice being poured out so that common grace can be shown to the world. “**For God so loved the world,**” not that he would save all the world from hell through Christ, but that he would send the world a second Adam who would teach the world about God and who

would be able to bring from out of that world any man or woman that the Father so desired to salvation in a sacrifice that was sufficient for all, and efficient for the elect.

The language here is of all flesh being “cut off.” This is actually a clever pun on this very sacrifice of Noah. For to make a covenant is to “cut” a covenant (Gen 15:17-18; Jer 34:18; Zech 11:10). But God has just “cut off” all flesh by bringing about a great curse for their sin. To be “cut off” is, throughout the OT, being cut off from the covenant (Gen 17:14; Isa 56:4-6; Ezek 17:17-18; etc). This shows us in a round-about way that all flesh was actually under a covenant already!<sup>10</sup> They were cut off; now the covenant is being recut.

This is made more certain by the word used to “establish” (*qum*) a covenant. This is not a word that means to make a brand new covenant. Rather, it is a word that means to reconfirm a covenant. Wenham has shown this conclusively saying, “‘To confirm’ is used of ratifying pre-existing ‘words’ (Deut 9:5), ‘promises’ (2 Sam 7:25), ‘threats’ (Jer 30:24), ‘oaths’ (Gen 26:3), ‘vows’ (Num 30:14), as well as ‘covenants’ (Dumbrell, *Creation and Covenant*, 25–26; cf. TDOT 2:260).”<sup>11</sup>

If this is true, then what covenant is being confirmed? The covenant in Genesis 9 may very well go back to the covenant in Genesis 6:18, where the word “covenant” (*berith*) is first used in the Bible. However, that too uses the word “confirm.” That means that covenant God made with Noah was based on some prior covenantal relationship.

Covenant theology sees a prior gracious covenant being given to Adam after the fall, when God promises Eve that she will have a Seed who will destroy the serpent. This covenant is “cut” in the blood of an animal that becomes skins for Adam and Eve. Curiously, the very same language is used in our passage. “I establish my covenant with you and your seed after you...” (Gen 9:9). The promise of the Seed is a covenantal promise that goes from here through many other covenants in the OT. They are fulfilled in Jesus Christ, who is the Seed in those OT covenants, as Galatians 3:16 tells us. That covenant was based on an oath as well. Hebrews says, “This one was made a priest with an oath by the one who said to him: ‘The Lord has sworn and will not change his mind, ‘You are a priest forever.’ This makes Jesus the guarantor of a better covenant” (Heb 7:21-22).

---

<sup>10</sup> In note 11 we will see how the covenant of creation (works) fits into this. Here, I believe it is important to remember that all flesh was under the terms of the covenant of works made in Genesis 1. Most of the terms of the Noahic covenant reestablish things from Genesis 1, thus, the covenant of works is being reestablished with Noah. Yet, so also is the gracious covenantal promise given to Adam in Genesis 3, as we will see.

*TDOT Theological Handwörterbuch zum Alten Testament*, ed. E. Jenni and C. Westermann or G. Botterweck and H. Ringgren

<sup>11</sup> Gordon J. Wenham, *Genesis 1–15*, vol. 1, Word Biblical Commentary (Dallas: Word, Incorporated, 1998), 175.

You see, when you read or hear about this covenant with Noah, it points you forward to the covenant made with Jesus. In fact, the covenant with Noah is one of the covenants in the OT that actually typified or symbolized the covenant with Jesus. In fact, in as much as the covenant is promised to the seed, the covenant is actually **spoken to Jesus** here in the Noah story, even as Jesus is spoken to in many of the other covenants where the Seed is promised.

In other words, the covenant with Noah is **not an end to itself**. As gracious and glorious as it is to be promised never to have God destroy the world again in a flood, the flood itself is a type of the future in Christian baptism (**1 Peter 3:20-21**). As such, it has both death and life in view. The flood was a foretaste that points to a greater, permanent, more horrible **wrath** yet to come by fire. But the covenant that comes out of the flood with all of its common **grace** blessings that allow seasons and harvests and time—so that the common rhythms of life will not cease (**Gen 8:21**).<sup>12</sup> Those blessings also point forward to greater, permanent, infinitely more wondrous blessings in the age to come and the promise of eternal life.

That is why, when you hear or read the story of Noah, **your first thought is to be of Jesus Christ**. The movie that is **about to come out** on Noah will not do that for you. Many of the Bible stories we read to our children about Noah and the ark do not do this for you. Cartoons with Noah rarely do it for you. But the Bible teaches you and begs you to look to Christ in this story. He is the only one that can save you from the wrath of God. He is the only one whose sacrifice can make full atonement and take away your sin. He is the only one who **bridges** the gap between your sin and God's holiness, because heaven and earth itself. He is the only one who brings **peace** between a God at war with his enemies who pridefully and without repentance persist in their sin.

### **Covenant Sign**

These ideas of a bridge and peace is a theme we began looking at this morning with the rainbow. Now, I want to turn our attention to **the sign of the covenant** that God made with Noah. **“And God said, ‘This is the sign of the covenant that I**

---

<sup>12</sup> **Going Deeper:** In my understanding, the idea of “day and night” in **Genesis 8:21** goes back to the covenant of creation/life/works made in Genesis 1. This covenant, as we saw there, was made with all of creation, but man has a special role in it—to govern and rule and obey God. This covenant is confirmed in places like **Jeremiah 33:20-25** where God made a covenant with the “day and the night.” The fact that all of creation is involved in the blessings of the Noahic covenant seems to me to point out that this covenant with creation will also continue, and is thus a re-establishing of that great pre-fall covenant as well as the post-fall covenant. So, all of the language in the preamble and stipulations of **Genesis 9:1-7** that point back to Genesis 1. Here, the language of “binding” an oath that is part of marriage covenants for example (**Num 30:2ff; 13-14**) and other covenants (**Ezek 20:37; Jer 27:2; Dan 6:8**) comes into play with the creation covenant. Again, as we saw there, the creation is said to be “bound” (**Job 38:31**) by his decree (**Jer 5:22**), ordinances and rules (**Job 38:33**).

make between me and you and every living creature that is with you, for all future generations: I have set my bow in the cloud, and it shall be a sign of the covenant between me and the earth” (Gen 9:12-13).<sup>13</sup>

So what is a biblical sign? We all know instinctively that signs point to something else. When you drive by a billboard on the freeway, you know that the billboard is not the reality. Even when you see the sign of some store over the building, you know that you have to go through the sign to get to the reality to which it points. Also importantly, biblical signs are **not like grave markers**, pointing you to something that is only in the past, something now dead. Rather, as **Richard Barcellos** says of the Lord’s Supper, “signs ... signify *present participation or present communion in the present benefits procured by Christ’s body and blood.*”<sup>14</sup> The rainbow likewise, as a sign of the Noahic covenant, points us to *present* benefits and a *present* participation in grace of God. But just how does the bow do this?

Notice first that most of the translations say “bow” rather than “rainbow.” The word in Greek for a rainbow is *iris*. In fact, there was a Greek goddess called **Iris**. She is the goddess of the rainbow, and her job was to be a personal messenger of Hera, or to put it another way, since messenger in Greek is *aggelos*—an angel that mediated between heaven and earth. The rainbow was a sign of this linkage, a bridge like the *Bifröst* in the Nordic Sagas and Superhero movie.

Of course, Genesis was originally penned in Hebrew, not Greek. The word it gives for “bow” in Hebrew is *qesheth*, and almost every time the word is used, it refers **not to a rainbow, but to the weapon**: the bow and arrow. Curiously, the LXX translates the Hebrew word not as *iris*, but as *toxon*, the word for the weapon, rather than the rainbow. This word is used one time in the NT in **Revelation 6:2**, “**And I looked, and behold, a white horse! And its rider had a bow, and a crown was given to him, and he came out conquering, and to conquer.**” Curiously, “rainbow” (*iris*) is used only three times in the NT and LXX combined. We’ve seen two of those already, when it describes the heavenly throne room. The other time is **Revelation 10:1**, “**Then I saw another mighty angel coming down from heaven, wrapped in a cloud, with a rainbow over his head, and his face was like the sun, and his legs like pillars of fire.**” Make no mistake, this is Jesus in his glorious form which in Revelation is identified with the Angel (just as he is in the OT).

---

<sup>13</sup> It is important to notice that just like the Sabbath which did not begin when God made it to be a sign of the covenant with Moses (Ex 31:13), so also this is almost certainly not the first rainbow that God ever created. While some people may have a particular scientific theory that says it never rained prior to the flood, this is by no means a necessary biblical conclusion. All that is going on here is that God is giving the rainbow a new meaning. NOW it is to be a sign.

<sup>14</sup> *Lord’s Supper*, Ch. 3. PDF file.

Even more curiously, the image of Jesus here is of a warrior, just like when he has a bow in his hand. He has a little scroll and his voice is like a lion roaring (2-3). Suddenly, when he calls out, “the seven thunders sounded.” What is thunder associated with? A storm. Psalm 29 says, “The voice of the LORD is over the waters; the God of glory thunders, the LORD, over many waters ... The LORD sits enthroned over the flood” (vv. 3, 10).

Now listen to Psalm 18. “And he sent out his arrows and scattered them; he flashed forth lightnings and routed them” (vs. 14). God’s arrows are the lightning. It is the same image you often see of Zeus, except this is not some pretender to the throne like Zeus or Baal (whom many scholars actually believe are the same deity).

<b>Zeus and Baal with their Lightning</b>	
	
<p>Zeus with eagle &amp; lightning, Athenian red-figure amphora C5th B.C., Musée du Louvre, Paris.</p>	<p>"Baal of Lightning." In his left hand he holds a spear which flashes lightning and in his right hand a mace. Setla, 1900-1750 BC Louvre Museum in Paris.</p>

This is the Cloud-Rider. Yahweh in the OT. “He lays the beams of his chambers on the waters; he makes the clouds his chariot; he rides on the wings of the wind” (Ps 104:3; cf. Isa 19:1). Jesus in the NT. “Then will appear in heaven the sign of the Son of Man, and then all the tribes of the earth will mourn, and they will see the Son of Man coming on the clouds of heaven with power and great glory” (Matt 24:30).

Why? Because Jesus IS Yahweh of the OT at least in his visible form: the Angel of Yahweh, the mediator between heaven and God’s people. He is most likely the one speaking to Noah now (see Jdg 2:1). He is the one who Daniel sees in his night vision, “Behold, with the clouds of heaven there came one like a son of man, and he came to the Ancient of Days and was presented before him” (Dan 7:13). Of course, Jesus is also called the morning star (2 Pet 1:19; Rev 2:28; 22:16), and I thought a little side note here would be interesting. The Akkadian equivalent of *qesheth* is *qaštu*. This word means “a bow, archer, or a constellation or star.”<sup>15</sup>

<sup>15</sup> Ludwig Koehler et al., *The Hebrew and Aramaic Lexicon of the Old Testament* (Leiden; New York: E.J. Brill, 1999), 1155.

Remember the Milky Way and the idea of the rainbow bridge? The Milky Way is full of stars. There are a lot of themes here that are revolving around one another.

So if lightning is Christ's **arrow**, you know that he has to have a **bow**. Thus, Habakkuk sings, "**You stripped the sheath from your bow, calling for many arrows. You split the earth with rivers. The mountains saw you and writhed; the raging waters swept on; the deep gave forth its voice; it lifted its hands on high. The sun and moon stood still in their place at the light of your arrows as they sped, at the flash of your glittering spear**" (**Habakkuk 3:9-10**). In fact, in **Psalm 18** where God has arrows of lightning, he is also the Glorious Cloud-Rider (**9-10**), for he is the LORD of creation and the LORD of the flood.

Is the imagery starting to come together in your mind? Genesis 9 obviously has a rainbow in mind, even though it uses the word for a weapon, for it is in the clouds. The rainbow is that thing of never ending beauty, but a thing that cannot be grasped or reached. It is like God himself. **You can never get to the end of the Rainbow**, nor can you reach out and touch it. Dorothy wondered if there was not a place somewhere over the rainbow where there isn't any trouble. Indeed, there is. It is in the very throne room of God. But one does not enter this throne room by clicking their heels three times, nor by pretending that there is peace when there is no peace, nor by thinking they can cross *Bifröst* like some heavenly being, nor by offering some sacrifice of your own. One only crosses the rainbow through trusting by faith alone in Christ to get you to the other side. But why should he do this?

**Look at how God's weapon is positioned in the sky?** Is not the bow actually facing up? God's lightnings came down and all flesh was destroyed. But now, in the sign of the covenant, God lays his weapon in the cloud and behold, it is pointing towards him. His arrows are pointing at himself! But why?

He tells us at the end of the passage. "**When I bring clouds over the earth and the bow is seen in the clouds...**" (**Gen 9:14**). **Who is seeing the bow?** Noah? No, but God himself. "**I will remember my covenant that is between me and you and every living creature of all flesh. And the waters shall never again become a flood to destroy all flesh**" (**Gen 9:15**). God has sworn, and since there is no one and no thing higher by which he may swear, if he does not carry out his word, the bow is telling you that **God is calling a curse down upon himself**. It is a truly incredible picture, "**May the arrows pierce me. May my very bow be the instrument of my own demise.**"

Do you see how it says, "**When the bow is in the clouds, I will see it and remember the everlasting covenant between God and every living creature of all flesh that is one the earth.**" God said to Noah, "This is the sign of the covenant that I

have established between me and all flesh that is one the earth” (Gen 9:16-17).

Could there possibly be a greater sign than that? A sign of war that becomes a sign of true peace? A sign of heaven itself and throne of God? A sign that is very much like God himself, so full of color yet so impossible to reach and attain?

Actually, there is! That sign is Christ himself.

“Therefore the Lord himself will give you a sign. Behold, the virgin shall conceive and bear a son, and shall call his name Immanuel” (Isa 7:14). It is he who has come down, not as lightning and thunder, but in crying and frailty, a man of flesh. It is he who gives the sign of Jonah—a type of the flood—that he would die and be raised in three days (Matt 12:39-40). Was not Jonah himself thrown into the sea because “the LORD hurled a great wind [and mighty tempest] upon the sea” (Jonah 1:4) and the stout sea fairing men became sorely afraid (Jonah 1:15)? And does not Jonah lament in song, “For you cast me into the deep, into the heart of the seas, and the flood surrounded me; all your waves and your billows passed over me” (Jonah 2:3). And was not great woe upon our Lord Jesus when they nailed him to a cross and the time came for him to give himself as a sacrifice for sin?

That is why we must worship him and sing to him and trust in him and pray to him and obey him. I know I have mentioned a lot of gods today, and perhaps it has made some of you uncomfortable. But I had a purpose beyond just telling you some ancient stories. You see, Zeus never did that. Baal never did that. Iris never did that. Thor never did that. Heimdall never did that. Kane never did that. The world misses the truth at the essential point. Rather, those fallen angels watched as Jesus did that. Then, they stood bewildered when he rose from the dead, completing the sign of Jonah, and then ascending into heaven to take his seat at the right hand of the father above any name or power in heaven.

One day, the our Lord will return. And when he does, he will descend with the sound of a trumpet. His face will shine like the sun. His legs will be pillars of fire. And he will come wrapped in a cloud, with a rainbow over his head, to take his seat as the King of his new creation, and to judge the living and the dead. Do you know yourself to be in him today? When you see the rainbow, is your first thought of him? May it be true of you. May it be true of me. May you find peace today knowing that God will never break his covenant, that his word is sure, that his promises stand firm, until the end of the age, and the consummation of the age to come, somewhere over the rainbow, in a never-dying land where the really is no trouble, because the King has defeated all of his enemies and sits enthroned forever.