



The Pattern of the Covenant

Genesis 7-9

Abouna Angelos
St. Raphael & St. John Coptic Orthodox Church
Chapel Hill, NC

February 27, 2019

Then the LORD said to Noah, “Come into the ark, you and all your household, because I have seen that you are righteous before Me in this generation. (Genesis 7:1)

Introduction

The Lord found Noah to be righteous, in fact the only righteous man in his generation. This is part of a repeating pattern.

Then the LORD said to Noah, "Come into the ark, you and all your household, because I have seen that you are righteous before Me in this generation. (Genesis 7:1)

Righteousness

It is a beautiful thing for God to say that you are righteous, correct, pleasing. What could someone do to attain to God calling him *righteous*? What was it about Noah that caught the gaze of God, that God called him righteous?

Abraham in Genesis 12 left his land and came into a new land that God showed him. Abraham in Genesis 15 is anxious, thinking he is barren. When God told him, You will be as numerous as the stars and the sands, Abraham believed God, for which God credited it to Abraham for righteousness.

And he believed in the LORD, and He accounted it to him for righteousness. (Genesis 15:6)

Abraham was comforted; his heart was at peace. Because he believed in God, he was at peace. Those who do not believe go on in anxiety.

Imagine you are a student in a big school. You are anxious about your test results. When a friend says, "Don't worry, you'll pass," you go on worrying. Then you go to the teacher, who says with a confident smile, "You will pass." The teacher is the one who will decide the grade. Therefore, your heart has reason to be comforted. To have righteousness means to have to believe in God by having your heart comforted by God, by having your heart set at rest by God.

This understanding is the key to the words of St. Paul to the Romans and to the Galatians. It is a key element in the New Testament. It is the righteousness of faith. "Do not worry what you will eat." "Seek ye first the kingdom of God and His righteousness."

Sequence Pattern

Let us now read from Genesis 8:13. We are coming into the covenant. There is a sequence pattern which happens over and over again throughout the Bible. The pattern is:

1. Answer of faith. There is a calling which is answered by faith. This faith is called “righteousness.” It is a trust in God. There are three theological virtues, faith, hope, love, and the greatest is love, but faith is the foundation, for you cannot have love without trust. Thus, trust or faith is the beginning. Why is faith the beginning of the relationship with God? God said, You shall die; the serpent said, You shall *not* die. Well, which is it? Whom do you trust?
2. Baptism. The second element of the pattern is a cleansing, or, rather, a complete purging, of sin—by water. Noah is born of water to become the new Adam in the new world that God has prepared, that is the new heaven and the new earth.
3. Covenant. The third element of the pattern is a covenant which contains all the elements of a covenant that we discussed previously, including sacrifice, swearing (with the number 7 all over the place), and a seal.

Examples of the pattern

How do we get someone to be part of the church? They confess the Gospel. They say “I believe...” They are dunked in water and baptized. They come out and receive the seal of the covenant which is the cup of Christ, “Take drink; this is the blood of the new covenant.”

Old Testament

In Exodus, there is the same pattern. In chapter 12, there is the Passover. There were 10 plagues. God said to Moses: There will be one final plague that will shake Pharaoh, and then he will let you go. For you to be protected from this plague, you need to sacrifice the Passover lamb, put the blood on your doorposts and lintels. They did exactly that.

Hebrews 12 says, “By faith the Israelites sacrificed the Passover lamb, and the angel of death did not touch their first-born...”

What was their salvation? Was it that their firstborn did not die? No. It was that they got delivered out of Egypt. Their deliverance was deliverance not from death but from bondage.

In Genesis 14, what does God do, now that they trusted God and got out of Egypt? Israel from Egypt is eight hours by chariot or two days by foot. There is no escape if the armies of Egypt are behind you. What did God do? There was a purging of Egypt. The armies were dead on the shore by the end of that day. There is a type (τύπος) of baptism in the red sea. God spoke, split the water, and they went out on dry land. But the water washed away the Egyptian army. After this baptism comes the Covenant of Sinai (see Exodus 24:4).

And Moses wrote all the words of the LORD. And he rose early in the morning, and built an altar at the foot of the mountain, and twelve pillars according to the twelve tribes of Israel. Then he sent young men of the children of Israel, who offered burnt offerings and sacrificed peace offerings of oxen to the LORD. And Moses took half the blood and put it in basins, and half the blood he sprinkled on the altar. Then he took the Book of the Covenant and read in the hearing of the people. And they said, “All that the LORD has said we will do, and be obedient.” And Moses took the blood, sprinkled it on the people, and said, “This is the blood of the covenant which the LORD has made with you according to all these words.” (Exodus 24:4-8)

Notice the parallel language between different parts of the Bible.

Again, we see the pattern:

1. Challenge, response of faith (“righteousness”)
2. Baptism, flood, washing away of evil
3. Covenant, altar of sacrifice

The rainbow of the Covenant with Noah was perhaps the first time the sun rays hit the atmosphere. What is a rainbow? It happens when sun rays cross through water. Perhaps this was the first time anyone saw this, that formerly there was a covering canopy.

New Testament

In Ephesians 5:22-33, there is the story about man and woman, husband and wife—the most vivid covenant in humans. Remember, a covenant is a what? It is a *family bond of blood, flesh, and bones*.

In John 13, there is the washing of the feet. It is baptism—or something similar to it—to renew it. This is almost like the ritual washing before the wedding. Here Christ bathes his bride, *the Church*, before he unites himself to her.

in order to make her holy by cleansing her with the washing of water by the word... (Ephesians 5:26)

What is the meaning of the wedding “shower” [there is a pun] (the party when the girls get together and shower the bride with gifts)? Nothing. It is a western humanism to make the bride feel good. Her friends would do well to wash her feet and prepare her spiritually ready for that relationship.

Repentance and confession are the renewal of baptism and the preparation for communion.

Mystery of Baptism

When the priest goes to purify the water of baptism, they read a lot of prayers, “they pierced his side with the spear,” “the water of baptism came out,” “the Blood of the Covenant by the Eucharist,” etc.

Baptism is cleansing, and cleansing is baptism. That is why the Church insists that anybody who comes to communion has been cleansed by baptism. It would be otherwise unthinkable.

Nicodemus says, “We really believe in you.” Jesus says, “Great, but you lack the rest of it; you need to be baptized to enter the Kingdom of God, to become the Bride of Christ.”

When people come to baptism, they come repentant.

“Therefore let all the house of Israel know assuredly that God has made this Jesus, whom you crucified, both Lord and Christ.”

Now when they heard this, they were *cut to the heart*, and said to Peter and the rest of the apostles, “Men and brethren, what shall we do?” (Acts 2:36-37)

In Acts, when Peter preaches that God made Jesus, whom they crucified, the Lord and Messiah, “they were cut to the heart,” they were sobbing in front of Peter on the day of Pentecost. They said, “Brethren what shall we do?” Peter said, “Let everyone repent and be baptized.” So repentance is a prerequisite and a preliminary part of the baptism rite.

Then Peter said to them, “Repent, and let every one of you be baptized in the name of Jesus Christ....” (Acts 2:38)

In Ezekiel 36 we see the purification after defilement which is a type (τύπος) of baptism.

“Then I will sprinkle clean water on you, and you shall be clean; I will cleanse you from all your filthiness and from all your idols. (Ezekiel 36:25)

Mystery of Reconciliation

Notice that rather than repeat this baptism (as the Lord will never repeat the deluge or the parting of the red sea or the sign of Jonah or the testing of Abraham or the crucifixion of the Lamb of God), we wash our feet—by repentance and confession.

The LORD ... said in his heart: “Never again will I ... destroy all living creatures, as I have done. While the earth endures, seedtime and harvest, cold and heat, summer and winter, day and night will never cease.” (Genesis 8:21)

By repenting, we remain in our baptism. We need our feet to be washed. Here is the intimacy with God. The child was out playing in the mud, and the mother says, “Here, give me your pants....” She washes them in the sink, and gives them back to the son to be presentable.

"If I do not wash you, you have no part with Me."

"He who is bathed¹ needs only to wash his feet² [to be] completely clean." (John 13:8-10)

The washing of the feet is the mystery of reconciliation in the Church. No one should be in mortal sin (abortion, murder, adultery) and go and take communion. It would be really bad. The problem is more the unworthy taking of communion which is more lethal than the sin itself. It requires discipline of a priest.

Faith

If I didn't know anything we are talking about, I would say this means: if you believe in God, you are a child of God. However, from Nicodemus (and from John 1:12-13) we know this is saying they have the power, the right, to become Children of God, but they do not automatically become the children of God by believing. It is not that you are declared the Child of God the moment you believe. The devils believe. You receive the *right* to become a child of God. You have the right to vote because you're 18 in this country. But then if you do not vote, you do not vote; you forsake your right. Faith is a potential. It goes with what we said in the sequence of events.

But as many as received Him, to them He gave the right to become children of God, to those who believe in His name: who were born, not of blood, nor of the will of the flesh, nor of the will of man, but of God. (John 1:12-13)

The covenant is to become the household of God. The basis is believing. The next step is baptism. The next step is covenant. It is not established unless the person has been born again of God and taken the body and blood of Christ.

Believing is necessary but not sufficient. This is against "*Sola Fide*." There is a sequence, to become fully part of the family. The sequence in the Old Testament does not change in the New Testament.

It is initiated by God. We respond: Yes I trust, this is your garden, this is your place. God says, Don't do this or that, we obey. God founded this relationship,

¹baptized

²repent and confess

not us. Christ is for us the foundation, the rock, of this relationship. This is not based on me; I can do nothing; I just respond to God's invitation.

God: "Come!"

We: "Where?"

God: "Come and see!"

Conclusion

Review the places in the Bible that we read, and make your own meditation. See how God did these things in our lives. See how we are called to renew our covenant with God. Remember what God had done with us. Say, "We remember you," as we commemorate. Husband and wife go to their bedroom to renew their covenant to review their responsibility for one another; in their physical intimacy. This physical intimacy is the same as intimacy with our Lord, by preparing ourselves, going to Him and partaking and living with Him, living so every day. These are things not to be taken legally but to be lived every single day.

This pushes me more to confess my sins and prepare for the washing, to prepare for the renewal of our baptism, to have a serious talk with Him, to prepare ourselves to come and approach Holy Communion. This will make the Communion very interactive.

"If I do not wash you, you have no part with Me." (John 13:8)

Otherwise, it is like a husband a wife who have a physical relationship but they really don't talk. It doesn't work. After a while, that relationship will fall apart.