

# Stories of the Hebrew Bible

## Lesson 2: Noah and the Flood – Promises and Covenants

2.07.2021

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**Objectives:** Exploring archetypal story of promises and covenanting.

**Materials:** Teachers should download lesson plan and attachments onto their desktop.

**Time allotment:** Suggested for 60 minute online class.

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### 1. Zoom Welcome (as youth arrive into the breakout classroom)

- Teachers and youth are expected to log on to zoom at 11:15am (15 min before class begins at 11:30am) so that everyone can be organized into correct breakout classrooms. We want to make sure there is an attentive adult in each breakout classroom with youth.
- Greet youth and ask everyone to correct their display name as needed. Ask everyone to select “gallery view” to see everyone else.
- Staff will attend to attendance.

### 2. Zoom Icebreaker: Show and Tell (5 minutes, begin while waiting for everyone to arrive)

Invite each youth to get *a pet, a plant, or a picture* that is important to them. Have them share, one at a time, about what they chose and why.

### 3. Chalice Lighting

Light a chalice at your home, invite youth to light their own chalices and say together: *“We light this chalice as a symbol of our faith, the light of truth and the warmth of love.”*

**Teacher reads:** (paraphrased from Sam Wells, theologian and ethicist)

*“Covenants are acts of trust rather than distrust. And with covenants, the important question is not whether you know what you are promising (ask any parent or newlywed whether they really knew what they were promising). The important question is whether you are the kind of person who can be held to a promise you made when you did not fully know what you were promising.”*

### 4. Brief Check-in (5 minutes)

Continue weekly ritual/check-in (e.g. sharing a joy or sorrow so that everyone feels present in class).

## 5. Sayings from the Hebrew Bible (10 minutes)

Many stories of the Hebrew Bible are well-known, familiar stories that have shaped our wider culture. Throughout this course, you are encouraged to seek out references to these stories in books, movies, in school, and in conversation! Let's see what references you already know.

- **Screen share** lesson attachment 2a (Is it in the Hebrew Bible?)
- Invite youth to use “Annotate” to mark a box if they *do* think it comes from the Hebrew Bible and leave it blank if they *don't* think it does. (At the top of the screen share on the menu bar, click Annotate.)
- Reading aloud from lesson attachment 2b (Answer Sheet), reveal whether each text is from the Hebrew Bible or New Testament.
- Ask youth if there were any surprises.
- Can youth think of any additional references – in movies, books, characters, something in a magazine? Some examples:
  - Serpent as representative of evil (Harry Potter) – a reference to the Book of Genesis
  - Tree of Knowledge of Good and Evil, and Tree of Life – reference from Genesis
  - “Am I my brother's keeper?” – reference to Cain and Able from Genesis
  - *Indiana Jones & the Raiders of the Lost Arc* – reference to the Arc of the Covenant built by Moses to contain the tablets of the Ten Commandments.
  - In *Star Trek*, Mr. Spock's “Live long and prosper” hand gesture was taken from a Hebrew blessing gesture dating back to the Older Testament.

## 6. Introduction to Noah and the Flood Story (10 minutes)

**Question for Discussion:** What do we already know about Noah and the Flood? Just as with many popular stories we have heard, from *Cinderella* to the *Three Little Pigs*, the tale of Noah's Ark has been told in many different ways. What do you recall about this story?

**Teacher summarizes** helpful context:

- In biblical times, people imagined the earth/ground as located between two great bodies of water: water *above* that gave rain and water *below* that seeped up.
- Ancient people also believed that God would punish them by shooting arrows of lightning from a bow in the sky; so a rainbow (empty of any arrows) after a storm meant they were in God's good graces once again.
- According to the Hebrew Bible, Noah's ark was built out of gopher wood. Scholars and historians do not yet know what exactly gopher wood was.

- In the Hebrew Bible version, God sends the flood as punishment for humanity's violence and corruption.
- The word "covenant" refers to a promise, but a particular kind of promise as we shall learn.
- The (attached) version of Noah's Ark story for this lesson is a compilation of two ancient versions: the Hebrew and the Mesopotamian.

## 7. Noah and the Great Flood (15 minutes)

Read the story aloud: Ask for one youth to read the narrator (or split between two) and one youth to read for God (lines in italics). Dramatics are welcome!

- **Screen share** lesson attachment 2c (Noah and the Great Flood).

### Questions for Discussion:

- How is this version of the story similar or different our first comments and memories about the story?
- The dove repeatedly returns to the ark, but why does the raven not? (*Hint: bit morbid but think about the raven as a bird that feeds chiefly on carrion, floating on the floodwaters.*)
- Strictly from the reading of the story itself (so keeping out prior interpretations we may have heard), is this a story about destruction or more a story about saving?

Note the following:

- *Why such detail about brining two of every living thing, down to every creeping insect?*
- *Why the details about storing up food?*
- *Why such repeated detail about the dove's flight and ensuring that the waters had receded?*
- *Why end with the focus on the rainbow and the covenant never to flood and destroy the earth?*

Contrary to being a story about death and destruction, the story focuses much greater detail on saving life and starting over again! The Jewish tradition even reads this story as a second creation, or Re-Creation, of God trying to start over again (the first creation being Genesis).

## 8. Special Promise Known as Covenant (15 minutes)

**Teacher summarizes:** Consider Noah’s story as a story about promises, a special and powerful promise called a “covenant.” Imagine when there is no storm cloud in sight, being asked to build an ark, 450 feet long and three stories high! But Noah follows through and builds an ark, trusting in God’s covenant to keep them safe. And later, God covenants with Noah (and the earth!) to never again use a flood to destroy the earth. These are huge promises!

### Questions for Discussion:

- How likely or unlikely are you to trust in a huge promise made by someone?
- What factors do you consider before taking them up on their promise?
- In modern legal society, what do we have to help insure against loss or injury when someone breaks their promise? (*We draw up contracts with lawyers to enforce.*)
- So what do think may be the difference between a *contract* and *covenant*?
  - Read the Sam Wells quote again, read during Chalice Lighting: *“Covenants are acts of trust rather than distrust. And with covenants, the important question is not whether you know what you are promising (ask any parent or newlywed whether they really knew what they were promising). The important question is whether you are the kind of person who can be held to a promise you made when you did not fully know what you were promising.”*
  - Read this excerpt from David Brooks of *The New York Times*: *“When we go out and do a deal, we make a contract. A contract protects interests, but a covenant protects relationships. A covenant exists between people who understand they are part of one another. It involves a vow to serve the relationship that is sealed by love... You take away that rich social fabric and what you are left with is people who are uncertain about who they really are. It’s hard to live daringly when your very foundation is fluid and at risk.”*
  - People in a contract provide one another services, but people in a covenant offer the gift of relationship with one another.

### Making Promises:

If time allows, invite youth to draw their hand on a piece of paper (when people make promises various cultures include hand gestures, like hand shakes or hands on one’s heart). Then ask youth to write a promise they would like to keep—to themselves, family, friends, someone specific, school, church, or the world—on their hand. Give youth an example of a promise you can make and keep. They are welcome, but not expected, to share.

## 9. Announcement: Next Sunday, there is no RE class because of Presidents’ Day Weekend.

**10. Extinguish the chalice**, saying together: *“May the light of truth and the warmth of love go with us in our hearts.”*

**11. Leave zoom breakout classroom:** wait until all youth have left, click “Leave” then “Leave Meeting.”