

# ADDITIONAL NOTES ON GOVERNMENT

## GENERAL PURPOSES OF GOVERNMENT

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- Genesis 9:6 constitutes the first mention of the law of retaliation
- The Old Testament principle of justice was “an eye for an eye”
- This law might seem harsh and cruel at first glance...but it established the principle that limited retribution to that which was just
- It was a merciful law because it limited vengeance
- In that sense, this law was foundational to all justice
- The whole system of law is based on the idea of a punishment fitting the crime...it ensured exact retribution
- It brought stability and equity to human relations
- In fact, various forms of this law date back to the ancient law code of Hammurabi (2285-2242 BC), the earliest reference to *lex taliones*
- But it is also clearly stated here in Gen 9...and later in the law of Moses
- The purpose of the law of retaliation was very clear...whatever crime a person committed against another person, that perpetrator was to receive as punishment the hurt they inflicted
- “It was intrinsically merciful because...the typical primitive blood feud knew nothing of equity. A small infraction by one tribe against another – for instance, trespassing – was met with a beating, which was returned by homicide, which was then countered by genocide. *Lex talionis* did away with this – on paper at least.”<sup>1</sup>
- There were a couple of features that are important to note about the law of retaliation
- First, it was meant to avoid a punishment that was too harsh...its major purpose was to prevent the punishment from exceeding the offense
- It prohibited disproportionate revenge...it limited punishment to the actual damage that was done
- It regulated the extent of retributive punishment...it had to be proportionate to the offense
- It made sure that the penalty would not be more severe than the crime...it ensured evenhanded justice
- It limited retaliation...and ensured fair punishments
- The goal of matching punishment was a law of restraint to ensure that the punishment was not excessive of the crime...the punishment wasn't to be too lenient...or too harsh
- Second, it was meant primarily for the community, not the individual...it was given to ensure that justice was administered publicly, not personally
- This refers to the civil sphere under the theocracy of Israel and not the personal sphere
- In other words, it pertained to civil justice, not personal justice...it gave the nation of Israel instructions for their judicial system
- It referred to the public administration of criminal law through the government
- Only the courts were permitted to use this law to settle disputes between individuals
- It was issued in order that the practice of seeking personal revenge might be discouraged
- So, retaliation was divinely forbidden for personal purposes

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<sup>1</sup> R. Kent Hughes, *The Sermon on the Mount*, 135-136.

- In fact the OT law strictly forbade personal retaliation

**Leviticus 19:18** ~ You shall not take vengeance, nor bear any grudge against the sons of your people, but you shall love your neighbor as yourself; I am the LORD.

- So, there was nothing harsh or cruel about this law...it was very fair and very just to have a punishment fit the severity of the crime
- It was a merciful law...because it limited the human tendency to seek retribution beyond what an offense deserved
- It served as a limitation to selfish overreaction...we are tempted to get more than just even...human vengeance is never satisfied with justice...it wants more
- It was also a good law...because it curtailed further crime...it restrained wrongdoing in society...it would make criminals think twice
- “What must not be lost sight of is that, unpleasant as is the task of the jailor and the use of the whip, the cell, the noose, the guillotine, these things stand behind the stability of civilized society, and they stand there necessarily, for God has declared it so, in harmony with reality, rather than with apostate sociological opinion. Government, with its coercive powers, is a social necessity, but one determined by the Creator, not by the statistical tables of some university social research staff! No society can successfully vote fines, imprisonment, corporal and capital punishment away permanently. The society which tries has lost touch with realities of man (his fallen sinful state), realities of the world, and the truth of divine revelation in nature, man’s conscience, and the Bible.”<sup>2</sup>
- So, this tells us that government is given to us as a mercy from God
- Government is meant to promote what is good and prevent what is evil
- Government restrains evil because people are made in the image of God (Gen 9:6)
- To institute capital punishment against murders is just because it upholds the dignity of the image bearer
- “To attack and to destroy man is tantamount to attacking and attempting to destroy the sovereign Himself of whom even fallen man is the image.”<sup>3</sup>
- This means that government is a mercy from God...it restrains evil, promotes order, and keeps human sinfulness in check
- This is one of the functions of human government

**Romans 13:3-4** ~ For rulers are not a cause of fear for good behavior, but for evil. Do you want to have no fear of authority? Do what is good and you will have praise from the same; 4 for it is a minister of God to you for good. But if you do what is evil, be afraid; for it does not bear the sword for nothing; for it is a minister of God, an avenger who brings wrath on the one who practices evil.

- 3 purposes of government are noted here:
  1. To Restrain Evil – by placing sufficient fear into the hearts of wrongdoers (v. 3a)
  2. To Promote Good – by encouraging citizens to keep the law and rewarding those who do with legal protection (vv. 3b-4a)
  3. To Punish Evil – by penalizing those who break the law with the “sword,” an instrument of death (v. 4b)

**1 Timothy 2:1-2** ~ First of all, then, I urge that entreaties and prayers, petitions and thanksgivings, be made on behalf of all men, 2 for kings and all who are in authority, so that we may lead a tranquil and quiet life in all godliness and dignity.

<sup>2</sup> Robert Duncan Culver, quoted in John MacArthur, *Why Government Can't Save You*, 47.

<sup>3</sup> Eugene Merrill, “A Theology of the Pentateuch,” in *A Biblical Theology of the Old Testament*, ed. Roy Zuck, 24.

**1 Peter 2:13-14** ~ Submit yourselves for the Lord’s sake to every human institution, whether to a king as the one in authority, 14 or to governors as sent by him for the punishment of evildoers and the praise of those who do right.

- Thus, government, with its ability to exercise capital punishment, is used by the Lord to restrain evil
- So, we must see that government, even with all of its problems, is a mercy from God
- “The institution of civil government is a dispensation of mercy, and its existence is so indispensable, that the moment it ceases under one form, it re-establishes itself in another. The world, ever since the fall, when the dominion of one part of the human race over another was immediately introduced (Gen 3:16), has been in such a state of corruption and depravity, that without the powerful obstacle presented by civil government to the selfish and malignant passions of men, it would be better to live among the beasts of the forest than in human society. As soon as its restraints are removed, man shows himself in his real character. When there was no king in Israel, and every man did that which was right in his own eyes, we see in the last chapters of the Book of Judges what were the dreadful consequences.”<sup>4</sup>

- Objections to capital punishment:

### **1. Is capital punishment only for just governments?**

- Some argue that capital punishment should only be carried out by righteous governments
- But there is really no such thing as a righteous government...since all govts are comprised of sinful people
- This is obvious in the fact that capital punishment (Gen 9:6) was instituted only a few verses after God acknowledged that “the intent of man’s heart is evil from his youth” (Gen 8:21)
- Also, when Paul affirmed governmental authority in Rom 13 and its ability to wield “the sword,” the Roman emperor was Nero, who was barbaric and ruthless in his treatment of Christians

### **2. What about the execution of innocent people?**

- This objection is often raised as a diversion by those who oppose capital punishment...they are not really addressing whether it is wrong or not...it focuses on the unfortunate exceptions when an innocent person is put to death
- To be sure, no one who supports capital punishment argues that innocent people should be executed
- “However, when God ordained capital punishment, and when Paul affirmed it, there was never a 100% guarantee that no one would be wrongly executed. Naturally there should be reasonable safeguards against this. However, it makes little sense to dispense with a divine command because it can’t be applied perfectly. In reality, in this fallen world, there are no perfect solutions, only trade-offs. Indeed, executing one innocent person is wrong, but is it right to ban all executions if this ban results in the killing of ten times as many innocent people by spared murderers?”<sup>5</sup>
- As Thomas Sowell says, “The only way to make sure that no innocent individual is ever falsely convicted is to do away with the criminal justice system and accept the horrors of anarchy.”<sup>6</sup>

### **3. The Argument that “It Doesn’t Deter Murder”**

<sup>4</sup> Robert Haldane, quoted in MacArthur, *Why Government Can’t Save You*, 45.

<sup>5</sup> Jonathan Sarfati, *The Genesis Account*, 604.

<sup>6</sup> Quoted in Sarfati, *The Genesis Account*, 605.

- While capital punishment may not deter all murders, certainly in the case of the one guilty of murder, it prevents him from murdering again
- Additionally, while not specifically addressing capital punishment for murder, the Mosaic law does describe the deterrent effect of capital punishment in general:

**Deuteronomy 17:12-13** ~ The man who acts presumptuously by not listening to the priest who stands there to serve the LORD your God, nor to the judge, that man shall die; thus you shall purge the evil from Israel. 13 “Then all the people will hear and be afraid, and will not act presumptuously again.

#### **4. What About Prison Instead of Capital Punishment?**

- Although pagan nations around Israel used imprisonment for criminals, there is little record that Israel used them
- Under the system of law and government that God set up for His people, long-term incarceration was not an option for punishment
- The Jews either executed criminals quickly or required them to work and pay reparations to those they committed crimes against
- Prisons became a part of life in America in the late 1700s when the idea was imported from Europe
- It was Quaker pacifists who introduced the idea that criminals could become “penitent” (hence the word “penitentiary”) if imprisoned
- However, most criminals who end up in prison fail to be truly reformed

### **OUR RESPONSIBILITY TOWARD AUTHORITY**

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- Built within fallen human nature is a desire to resist and to rebel against authority
- This has been abundantly evident within our country in the last couple of years as many have charged the government with exercising an overreach of its authority
- But we must remember that God works through authority, even when authority fails
- For believers, we are responsible for exercising civil obedience

**Romans 13:1** ~ Every person is to be in subjection to the governing authorities. For there is no authority except from God, and those which exist are established by God.

- To “be in subjection to the governing authorities” means to submit to and obey them
- This is true no matter how immoral, cruel, ungodly, or incompetent those authorities might be
- The reason for such obedience is “there is no authority except from God, and those which exist are established by God” (v. 1)
- “In whatever form it exists, government and its authority derive directly from God and exist to benefit human society. Like marriage, government is a universal institution that is valid regardless of place, circumstance, or other considerations. No matter what form it takes, all human government that has ever

existed (or will ever exist), in any nation, at any level, as part of any ethnic group, has been under God's sovereign control, because all 'power belongs to God' (Psalm 62:11)."<sup>7</sup>

- Thus, government is a crucial part of God's plan for fallen mankind...and its officials are His agents for maintaining order and justice in society
- Therefore, believers ought to seek to honor the authority ordained by God
- This principle was also evident in the OT

**Jeremiah 29:7** ~ Seek the welfare of the city where I have sent you into exile, and pray to the LORD on its behalf; for in its welfare you will have welfare.

- Additionally, believers must submit to government because, if they rebel against it, they are rebelling against God Himself

**Romans 13:2** ~ Therefore whoever resists authority has opposed the ordinance of God; and they who have opposed will receive condemnation upon themselves.

- And those who rebel against God's ordained authority will "receive condemnation upon themselves" (v. 2)
- Those who defy civil authority should expect to be punished

## WHEN TO EXERCISE CIVIL DISOBEDIENCE

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- The one exception to our civil obedience is whenever government requires us to disobey God's Word
- Numerous examples of justifiable civil disobedience exist in Scripture
- The Hebrew midwives:

**Exodus 1:15-17, 20** ~ Then the king of Egypt spoke to the Hebrew midwives, one of whom was named Shiphrah and the other was named Puah; 16 and he said, "When you are helping the Hebrew women to give birth and see them upon the birthstool, if it is a son, then you shall put him to death; but if it is a daughter, then she shall live." 17 But the midwives feared God, and did not do as the king of Egypt had commanded them, but let the boys live...20 So God was good to the midwives, and the people multiplied, and became very mighty.

- Daniel and his three friends and their unwillingness to eat the king's food:

**Daniel 1:8, 12-15** ~ But Daniel made up his mind that he would not defile himself with the king's choice food or with the wine which he drank; so he sought permission from the commander of the officials that he might not defile himself...12 "Please test your servants for ten days, and let us be given some vegetables to eat and water to drink. 13 Then let our appearance be observed in your presence and the appearance of the youths who are eating the king's choice food; and deal with your servants according to what you see." 14 So he listened to them in this matter and tested them for ten days. 15 At the end of ten days their appearance seemed better and they were fatter than all the youths who had been eating the king's choice food.

- Daniel's friends and their unwillingness to bow down to the statue:

**Daniel 3:16-18** ~ Shadrach, Meshach and Abed-nego replied to the king, "O Nebuchadnezzar, we do not need to give you an answer concerning this matter. 17 If it be so, our God whom we serve is able to deliver us from the furnace of blazing fire; and He will deliver us out of your hand, O king. 18 But even if He does not, let it be known to you, O king, that we are not going to serve your gods or worship the golden image that you have set up."

- Daniel's unwillingness to obey the king's edict to not pray:

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<sup>7</sup> MacArthur, *Why Government Can't Save You*, 27-28.

**Daniel 6:10** ~ Now when Daniel knew that the document was signed, he entered his house (now in his roof chamber he had windows open toward Jerusalem); and he continued kneeling on his knees three times a day, praying and giving thanks before his God, as he had been doing previously.

- The apostles' refusal to obey orders to not preach the Gospel:

**Acts 4:19-20** ~ But Peter and John answered and said to them, "Whether it is right in the sight of God to give heed to you rather than to God, you be the judge; 20 for we cannot stop speaking about what we have seen and heard."

**Acts 5:29** ~ But Peter and the apostles answered, "We must obey God rather than men."

# GOD'S PROMISE TO NOAH – PART 3

## GOD'S POST-FLOOD COVENANT CONTINUED

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### The Promise of the Noahic Covenant

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**Genesis 9:8-11** ~ Then God spoke to Noah and to his sons with him, saying, 9 “Now behold, I Myself do establish My covenant with you, and with your descendants after you; 10 and with every living creature that is with you, the birds, the cattle, and every beast of the earth with you; of all that comes out of the ark, even every beast of the earth. 11 I establish My covenant with you; and all flesh shall never again be cut off by the water of the flood, neither shall there again be a flood to destroy the earth.”

- Here is the formal statement of the Noahic Covenant, the very thing God promised previously
- The first mention of the covenant between God and Noah occurred in Genesis 6
- It was a prediction of the covenant that would be established with Noah after the flood

**Genesis 6:18** ~ But I will establish My covenant with you; and you shall enter the ark—you and your sons and your wife, and your sons' wives with you.

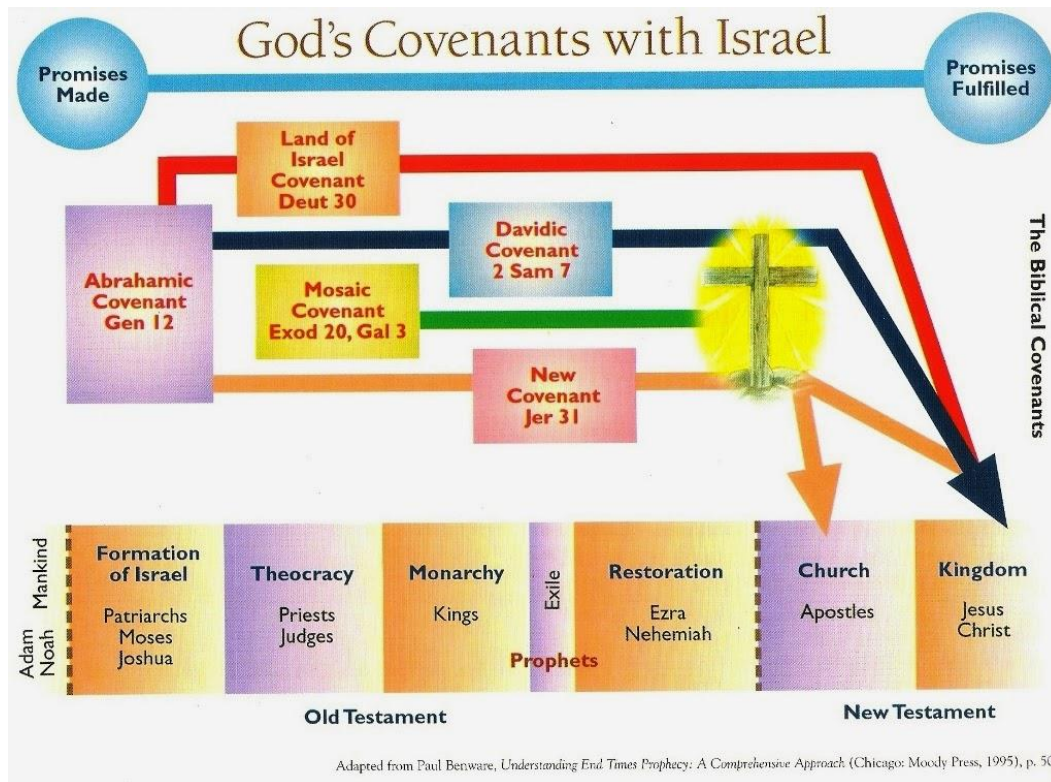
- This is the first occurrence of the word “covenant” (*berith*) in Scripture
- What is a covenant?
- Though not totally foreign to present-day vocabulary, the English term *covenant* is seldom used
- Outside of legal documents and marriage ceremonies, the word is mostly absent from normal conversation
- But covenants played a prominent role in OT life...they were very much a part of life in the culture of the ancient Near East...they were the foundation of society and all people knew what a covenant was
- Covenants affected people and nations socially, politically, and religiously
- In fact, the covenant idea itself, first mentioned in Genesis 6 during the time of Noah, is woven into the fabric of the Biblical record all the way through to Revelation 11 where the “ark of the covenant” reappears in the temple
- The word *covenant* occurs in 27 of 39 OT books and 11 of 27 NT books
- So, it is evident that covenants were common in the normal life of those in the ancient Near East
- Definition: “A covenant was an agreement between two parties that bound them together with common interests and responsibilities.”<sup>8</sup>
- It was “a compact or agreement between two parties binding them mutually to undertakings on each other’s behalf.”<sup>9</sup>
- It was a solemn and legally binding agreement between two parties to do or not to do certain things
- The Hebrew word for “covenant” is *berit* (בְּרִית) – an agreement, a covenant, a contract
- “In Old Testament usage, a [berith] means a league of friendship, either between man and man or between God and man, solemnly inaugurated, either by words alone or by words and symbolic ceremonies, in which obligations are undertaken on one or both sides. The obligations are often accompanied by an oath, and have the character of solemn promises.”<sup>10</sup>

<sup>8</sup> Paul Benware, *Understanding End Times Prophecy*, 32.

<sup>9</sup> Gleason Archer, “Covenant.” in *Evangelical Dictionary of Theology*

<sup>10</sup> Roger Beckwith, “The Unity and Diversity of God’s Covenants,” *Tyndale Bulletin*, 1987, 96.

- The Greek word for “covenant” is *diatheke* (διαθήκη) – covenant, agreement...it does not in itself contain the idea of joint obligation, it mostly signifies an obligation undertaken by a single person
- A covenant is a formal agreement or treaty between God and people that places obligations and regulations between the parties involved
- There are 7 dominant covenants in Scripture, 6 of which are made with the nation of Israel
- God entered into these 6 covenants with the people of Israel when he unilaterally and unconditionally announced their terms and stipulations
- It is these 6 covenants and their attendant promises which lay out the Lord’s kingdom plan that He began when He created man to be His vice-regent on planet Earth
- Most of those covenants were unconditional or non-nullifiable in that once the covenant was ratified it must be fulfilled:
  1. The Noahic Covenant (Gen 6:18; 9:8-17) – unconditional
  2. The Abrahamic Covenant (Gen 12:1-3; 15:1-21; 17:1-22) – unconditional
  3. The Mosaic Covenant (Ex 19:5-6; 20:1-17) – conditional
  4. The Priestly Covenant (Num 25:10-13; Ezek 48:11) – unconditional
  5. The Land/Palestinian/Deuteronomic Covenant (Deut 29:1-30:2) – unconditional
  6. The Davidic Covenant (2 Sam 7:4-16) – unconditional
  7. The New Covenant (Jer 31:31-34; Ezek 36:22-32) – unconditional



- The Noahic covenant was a promise to Noah that his family would not only be preserved, but that they would be privileged to participate in a covenant relationship with God
- Notice that God’s role as the initiator and authority for the covenant is reasserted 7 times, signifying the unconditional nature of this covenant: vv. 9, 11, 12, 13, 15, 16, 17
- Three different groups are the recipients of the covenant promise from God:



- Noah and his descendants, which includes every successive generation after him, or all mankind (v. 9) – this makes the Noahic covenant binding on all mankind after Noah since all of us come from Noah
- All the living creatures that were with Noah on the ark (v. 10) – this demonstrates God’s concern for His creatures
- The earth itself (v. 13), since the whole earth was destroyed by the flood
- The everlasting nature of this covenant is evident in key phrases:
  - “and your descendants after you” (v. 9)
  - “all flesh shall never again be cut off” (v. 11)
  - “for all successive generations” (v. 12)
  - “never again” (v. 15)
  - “everlasting covenant” (v. 16)
- The covenant remains in force as long as the earth remains
- God promised to preserve the stability of nature...to never flood the earth again (vv. 11, 15)
- This is the formal promise of what He had previously resolved in His heart

**Genesis 8:21-22** ~ The LORD smelled the soothing aroma; and the LORD said to Himself, “I will never again curse the ground on account of man, for the intent of man’s heart is evil from his youth; and I will never again destroy every living thing, as I have done. 22 While the earth remains, Seedtime and harvest, And cold and heat, And summer and winter, And day and night Shall not cease.”

- It guaranteed that nature would operate in a uniform fashion and provided the opportunity to function without the threat of global catastrophe
- Noah and his immediate descendants needed assurance that, when clouds formed and rain came forth from them in the future, the entire world would not be destroyed as it had been.
- While this covenant was a blessing to all creation, it also allowed for God’s kingdom and salvation plans to unfold in history
- Thus, the Noahic Covenant functioned as the platform for God’s plans to play out
- It is also provided the basis for the future biblical covenants
- The certainty of later covenants between God and His people is rooted in the order of nature promised in the Noahic Covenant

**Jeremiah 33:20-21** ~ “Thus says the LORD, 'If you can break My covenant for the day, and My covenant for the night, so that day and night will not be at their appointed time, then My covenant may also be broken with David My servant that he shall not have a son to reign on his throne, and with the Levitical priests, My ministers.’”

**Isaiah 54:9-10** ~ “For this is like the days of Noah to Me; when I swore that the waters of Noah should not flood the earth again, so I have sworn that I will not be angry with you, nor will I rebuke you. For the mountains may be removed and the hills may shake, but My lovingkindness will not be removed from you, and My covenant of peace will not be shaken,” says the LORD who has compassion on you.

- Although local floods would still result in death, a universal flood would never again occur

## **The Sign of the Noahic Covenant**

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**Genesis 9:12-17** ~ God said, “This is the sign of the covenant which I am making between Me and you and every living creature that is with you, for all successive generations; 13 I set My bow in the cloud, and it shall be for a sign of a covenant between Me and the earth. 14 It shall come about, when I bring a cloud over the earth, that the bow will be seen in the cloud, 15 and I will remember My covenant, which is between Me and you and every living creature of all flesh; and never again shall the water become a flood to destroy all flesh. 16 When the bow is in the cloud, then I will look upon it, to remember the everlasting

covenant between God and every living creature of all flesh that is on the earth.” 17 And God said to Noah, “This is the sign of the covenant which I have established between Me and all flesh that is on the earth.”

- As a sign of this covenant, the rainbow is a visible, repeatable phenomena that serves to remind God of the covenant that He has made with all the earth, never to destroy the earth again by flood
- The rainbow should also serve to remind us of what God did in destroying the whole earth because of its wickedness, and of His mercy towards us through His promise not to do it again
- “Rainbows are the result of well-known physics. When light enters at an angle into a substance where it travels more slowly, different wavelengths are bent differently. This effect is called *dispersion*. Since colour depends on wavelength, we see this dispersion as a band of different colours. The shorter wavelengths (violet and blue) are bent the most, the longer wavelengths (red and orange) are bent the least.”<sup>11</sup>
- Rainbows form when sunlight hits raindrops or water in the air
- The light refracts as it enters the water, then reflects internally from the opposite concave surface, then refracts again as it leaves the drop...thus, two refractions and one reflection
- Although there are numerous shades of color in a rainbow, most categorize them in 7 colors: ROYGBIV
- Of the rainbow John Gill said, “though it is a bow, yet without arrows, and is not turned downwards towards the earth, but upwards towards heaven, and so is a token of mercy and kindness, and not of wrath and anger.”<sup>12</sup>



- Unfortunately, the beauty of the rainbow and what it promises has been hijacked by the LGBTQ cause
- “But how did that flag become a symbol of LGBTQ pride? It goes back to 1978, when the artist Gilbert Baker, an openly gay man and a drag queen, designed the first rainbow flag. Baker later revealed that he was urged by Harvey Milk, one of the first openly gay elected officials in the U.S., to create a symbol of pride for the gay community. Baker decided to make that symbol a flag because he saw flags as the most powerful symbol of pride. As he later said in an interview, “Our job as gay people was to come out, to be visible, to live in the truth, as I say, to get out of the lie. A flag really fit that mission, because that’s a way of proclaiming your visibility or saying, ‘This is who I am!’” Baker saw the rainbow as a natural flag from the sky, so he adopted eight colors for the stripes, each color with its own meaning (hot pink for sex, red for life, orange for healing, yellow for sunlight, green for nature, turquoise for art, indigo for harmony, and violet for spirit).”<sup>13</sup>

<sup>11</sup> Sarfati, *The Genesis Account*, 612.

<sup>12</sup> *John Gill’s Exposition of the Entire Bible*, adapted from Online Bible by Larry Pierce.

<sup>13</sup> <https://www.britannica.com/story/how-did-the-rainbow-flag-become-a-symbol-of-lgbt-pride>



- Were there rainbows before the Flood? → Many assume that because the rainbow is first mentioned in Genesis 9, that that is also when it first appeared
- However, most likely rainbows existed prior to the end of the flood since dispersion of light would have likely happened since the time of creation
- Also, it is likely that God gave a new meaning to an already existing object (in much the same way Jesus gave a new meaning to bread and wine in the Lord's Supper)