



The Story Of Salvation

NCTM Tuesday Night Studies 2010

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4. The Flood

The account of the flood (Genesis 6-9) falls between the rebellion of Adam, and the choosing of Abraham. It falls between two genealogies, one tracing from Adam to Noah and his sons (ch. 5), and the other tracing from the sons of Noah to the nations of the known world (ch. 10). Another genealogy preceded that in chapter 5, where the descendants of Cain were traced (4:17-24), and another follows that in chapter 10, tracing the descendants of Shem through to Abram (11:10-32). These genealogies mark a division in humanity between the “children of God” and the “children of man”, essentially a division between those who call on the name of the Lord (4:26) and walk with God (5:24) and those who did not, but who were like Nimrod, “a mighty hunter before the LORD” (10:9) and who wanted to make a name for themselves, not being scattered over the face of the whole earth (11:4). The godly line is small, fragile, humble and seemingly “on the edge”; the ungodly line has all the power, strength and seeming security. Later in Scripture we see that the godly line are primarily marked not by good deeds, but by faith in a good God, who in His mercy justifies the ungodly. We learn too that members of the godly line are prophetic, that is they hear the word of God, and hold to that word and its promise.

All of these themes condense into the one event of the Flood.

6:1-8 (cf. 11:1-4)

These few verses have been controversial. In the book of Job, “sons of God” is a way of speaking of the angelic beings in the heavenly court (38:7; 1:6; 2:1). On this grounds some have taken these verses to mean that angels somehow slept with women and produced a new breed of giant humans, the Nephilim. There are many problems with this interpretation! It seems better in the genealogical context to see that the male descendants of the godly line (sons of God) married women from the ungodly line (daughters of men). Their offspring, the Nephilim are “men of renown” = men of a name, cf. 11:4.

There is traced here then an abandoning of faith in God and a trust in His promise for the future, a moving from humility and obedience into rank power and disobedience. This is what is shown in v. 5—there is now a complete disregard for the truth of God. This is the full flowering of the effects of the Fall, which are seen to be totally universal. “...every inclination of the thoughts of his heart was only evil all the time.” The whole thrust of man is “Let us cast off His chains from us.”

The LORD’s grief in His creating of man is a moral opposition to all that humanity has become; it is matched by pain in His depths. God’s wrath is not separate from His love, but in fact His wrath serves His love. God is love; He is not “wrath”. Exodus

34:6-9 spells this out. The judgments that follow then are primarily to serve His purpose of love and grace. Mercy always triumphs over wrath. Verse 8 is the indication in the text of this. This verse comes before the description of Noah as a righteous and blameless man. Grace (=favour) precedes goodness, rather than being the reward for goodness. The grace and favour to Noah is actually God's grace to the whole of His creation, by which a way through judgment to life will be worked out.

6:9-7:5

About Noah we are told that he was a righteous man, blameless in his generation, and that he walked with God. 2Peter 2:5 tells us that he was a preacher of righteousness, and Hebrews 11:7 that he was a man of faith. Noah's walking with God, his righteousness and blamelessness *preceded* God's speaking to him about the coming judgment. He stood in contrast to the depravity all around him.

We are told more about that depravity—the whole world was corrupt and *full of violence*. People had “corrupted their ways” rather than walking with God. This sounds very like Romans 1:18ff. Defiance of God leads inevitably to the mistreating of people (see Gen. 4:6ff, 23-24; 10:9-11 etc.) People are now not partners in the work of God, but rather rivals to supremacy in the world, and objects to be used in furthering the promotion of self.

When God spoke to Noah, He indicated His intention of judgment, and gave instruction to Noah about the way of salvation that lay ahead. This salvation was to include Noah and his family and also the animals of the earth (6:17-21). The Lord called this a covenant that He was establishing with Noah. “Establish” does not mean the beginning of an entirely new thing, but rather the consolidation and enactment of a purpose which had been set in place beforehand. Noah, his family and the animals of the earth were being included in the outworking of God's original plan for the creation. The judgment was necessary to limit the terrible evil that humanity was wreaking in the earth. Noah obediently does all that the Lord commanded him (7:5)

Judgment is a regular and proper part of God's providence for His world. Whilst a little later God promises to not judge the world in such a way again, He does not promise to not judge the world at all. His judgments are to be viewed by His people with all seriousness and with deep awe, as well as with thankfulness. Without these judgments there would be unrestrained evil in the world. As fierce and terrible as God's judgments are, there is much more to be feared in the evil and depravity and corruption of the human heart. His judgments come with pain in the heart; human violence delights in the expression of itself.

7:6-8:19 spells out the events of the Flood. NB the things that the LORD does in this section:

- 7:17—He seals Noah, his family and the animals in the ark
- 8:1—He remembered Noah and all with him in the ark, and so sent a wind to dry out the earth
- 8:15—He summoned Noah out of the ark, with his family and the animals

Noah is just surviving this event; he is kept through it all by the LORD.

8:20-9:17

Noah's response to God's saving him and his family and the animals is to worship the LORD sacrificially. This worship is accepted by the LORD and He vows within Himself (9:21) that such destruction will never come again, no matter what evil arises in human affairs. Clearly the situation of human sinfulness has not been "washed away", and so we see that Noah and his family are recipients of God's promises and salvation not by works but by grace. A covenant is made with creation, that the seasons will continue faithfully. (We need to hear this today in the face of human evil and violence, and of environmental change and degradation that accompanies it.)

Noah and his family are "re-blessed" along the lines of Eden: God's original purposes continue to be worked out. A few things have changed; now humanity is permitted to eat meat, and this will bring a dread of human beings to the creatures of earth, sky and sea. However consuming blood is forbidden, and this permission to eat meat must be clearly seen to not devalue life: it is not a carnivorous free-for all! Human life especially is safeguarded now by the requirement that murder be met by a death penalty. The violence of the pre-flood era is to be contained by this requirement.

The covenant to preserve creation is formally established by the word of God. A sign is given to ratify the word—the rainbow. Actually the word is "bow"—the weapon. The bow is being put in the sky; it has been laid aside. Apart from the word of God and the sign He gave, humanity would live in terror of the rain as another destructive judgment. The LORD promises to remember the covenant whenever He sees the rainbow.