

Dr. Kenneth Mathews, Genesis, Session 8, Noah and the Flood, Part 2, Genesis 6:9-9:29

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Session eight is, again, Noah and the Flood, part two.

This is the latter half of the Flood story, where you have the altar and God's promise upon disembarking, and we find in chapter eight that Noah built an altar, verse 20, and at that time, and it's certainly reasonable, isn't it, after such an act of salvation, he worships the Lord, and he offers thanksgiving to the Lord for the preservation. Importantly, verse 21 speaks of God's promise: never again will I curse the ground because of humanity, even though every inclination of his heart is evil from childhood, and never again will I destroy all living creatures as I have done. As long as the earth endures, seed time and harvest, cold and heat, summer and winter, day and night will never cease.

So, we have two features here. One is that God will not again bring about world destruction by water, and also that the seasons are going to be more predictable and productive. What is important for us, we can look at momentarily, where it speaks of how every inclination, every imagination, his heart is evil from childhood, which reminds us, doesn't it, of chapter six, verses four through eight, where it describes the sin of the violent people before the ark and the cause for the ark.

And so, there is an acknowledgment here that humanity is going to practice evil, and as John Calvin said, if God were not to give this promise, then there would have to be a flood every day, because humanity, as a result of its human nature, is given to evil and practices sinfulness. Nevertheless, God chooses in chapter nine to continue the blessing, and you can see in verse one and again in verse seven of chapter nine a repetition of the blessing that God gives to Adam and Eve. Verse one reads, then God bless Noah and his sons, be fruitful and increase in number and fill the earth.

So, there is the procreation of Adam in the blessing. Now, when it comes to exercising rule over the terrestrial sphere of God's creation, notice in verse two we have the beginnings of a provision by God to protect human life. The first one is an inherent fear of animals, and we find this on the part of animals toward humanity.

The fear and dread of you will fall upon all the beasts of the earth and all the birds of the air, upon every creature that moves along the ground, and upon all the fish of the sea. They are given into your hands. So that provision in his mind enhances when

it comes to the diet that's going to sustain the new human family after the flood; it would involve all and every, there's no prohibition.

However, when it comes to the animal world and eating meat, in verse four, there is a prohibition regarding the lifeblood because the blood is representative of life. What the passage is teaching us here is it is teaching us that God is the one who determines life and death, and it's a prohibition against humanity abusing and taking advantage of animal life in a wanton way without due respect to God as he is the creator. It is his privilege over life and death, not humanity.

It is only by delegation that we find humanity in a position to deal with human life. So we find in verses four through six a description of how human life is responsible to God for the way in which human life is treated. So, it's a protection against the kind of violence that ran rampantly within humanity before the flood.

And so, this protection is against murderers. In particular, we want to look at verse six, whoever sheds the blood of humanity. That language, shed the blood or blood-shedding, is a language for murder.

Whoever sheds the blood of man by man shall his blood be shed, for in the image of God has God made man. So, you can see that the motivation for capital punishment here, some kind of societal response to shedding blood, is grounded in the theology of creation, the image of God. The basis then is not what one's class is, what one's financial weight or societal position, not one's ethnicity, but rather that a human being who takes the life of another human being subjected himself to the most stringent response on the part of humanity as delegated here by God.

Now, when we turn to verses eight through eleven, we have the covenant specifics. You'll notice in verses eight through eleven that it is highly repetitious when it comes to the first person. And actually, that's true as well of the remainder of the covenant description.

Repeatedly, you'll see that God is the speaker saying, I, I, this, and I that, making it quite clear that God, again, by his sovereignty, has promised to make a covenant with Noah and Noah's descendants and, for that matter, all living creatures. So, it's universal in its scope. I now establish my covenant.

This is verses eight and nine. Let's read verse nine. I now establish my covenant with you and with your descendants after you.

So, this has to do with Noah and his descendants. I think this is an important feature of recognizing within Genesis this emphasis on you and your descendants. This will be true for Abraham, the covenant God makes with Abraham in his descendants, but

in the garden itself, it speaks of the offspring of the woman and how the promise that is given to the woman will be a promise for all humanity.

This is, of course, motivation for explaining why in chapter three, verse 20, Adam names his wife Eve and identifies the reason for this. She is the mother of all living. The genealogies also speak of the human legacy and how God is superintending the flow of history through continuity in the image of God from person to person and also God's willing blessing for all humanity without reference again to class or ethnicity.

The blessing and cursing of God all have to do with behavior, and that is within the will of a human being. You're not born with a destiny toward a certain behavior. You make choices regarding your behavior.

And then, as I said, with reference to all the living creatures, referring to what we find in Genesis chapter one, verse 11 reads, I establish my covenant with you. Never again will all life be cut off by the waters of a flood. Never again will there be a flood to destroy the earth.

So, all future generations will receive this promise, and it's a promise that we find that is forever. Then in chapter nine, verses 12 through 17, here we find that the sign of the covenant is described. The sign of the covenant is a bow.

The word is not actually rainbow, but it is a bow like bow and arrow. There are typically in covenants a sign. We find that this is the case for Abraham and the covenant made with him in Genesis 17, circumcision.

Another in Exodus 34, the sign for the Mosaic covenant is the Sabbath. When it comes to the universality, how appropriate that the skies provided the rainfall that, in turn, destroyed human families. Now we have a bow in the clouds, we're told.

This is a sign for all generations to come. How are we to understand what is this bow or rainbow? There are two different opinions and two different understandings. This is a weapon, and so has God set his weapon, his bow aside, hanging it in the clouds, making it clear from now on he will have a peaceful disposition toward humanity.

That there has been a reconciliation, or as some have understood it, that God is depicted in terms of his position as the divine warrior who has done battle against the human family. You might say he's done battle against murder and against violence. So, you have two ways of looking at it, but the point is that there will no longer be rainfall from the clouds or bursting forth from the subterranean waters to create a flood that destroys humanity.

Again, we are told in verse 16 that this is an everlasting covenant between God and all living creatures. This is the sign of the covenant. Now, when we come to verse 18, we have in verses 18 and 19 a description, a repetition of the offspring of Noah, Shem, Ham, and Japheth.

This is beginning to prepare us now for what we'll find in chapter 10, where we have a genealogy of these three sons, Shem, Ham, and Japheth. What's in the mind of the author and the reader is that this eight-person crew on board the ark will be the new providers of the families that God has intended to bless. Emerging from this, we will find in chapter 11 is Abraham, the particular family.

So, we find in verses 18 and 19, the sons of Noah who came out of the ark were Shem, Ham, and Japheth. Now in my version, the New International Version, the sentence that follows is in parentheses. It is giving us supplementary information regarding Ham and Canaan.

Canaan, the son of Ham, is described here as the father of Ham, the father of Canaan. And so this will be, of course, very important to the readers of Genesis, especially if I am right, that we find that Genesis is understood by its first audience in terms of Moses' audience in the wilderness, that the Torah is to be guiding us in understanding Genesis as Genesis preparatory for the teaching of the Pentateuch. So, the special concern here would have been regarding Canaan because the people of Israel were to go into the promised land of Canaan, and the Canaanites were a new people group to the Israelites who emerged from Egypt.

And what are they to make of this new people group? How are they to understand the Canaanites? So, what will follow then in this account of Noah's drunkenness and then the curse and blessing that falls upon the sons of Noah will be highly instructive for the people of Israel because what we will find then coupled with chapter 10 and the table of nations together is a map of the moral nature of these various people groups. Understanding those who are given immorality would serve as a forewarning of any kind of intermarriage or interaction with the people of Canaan, the Canaanites. So, when it comes to verses 20 through the end of the chapter, we will find a description of Noah that stands in contradiction with Noah's righteous conduct before the flood was promoted and championed.

Whereas now, when it comes to Noah, we will find that he falls into a drunken stupor, that he is lewd and naked. And so, what this reminds us is what was said earlier about how in chapter 8 at the end of that chapter describes God's promise not to destroy the earth by flood because, from his childhood, that is from the beginnings of the creation of humanity, from the garden account, the sin account that humanity has been given to sinfulness, wickedness. And here we have it.

In other words, with Noah, just as before the flood in the garden, we have the same old sin problem that will rage in the new world. Many times, Noah can be reckoned as the new Adam. After all, he is the progenitor of all peoples.

And just like Noah, or I should say Adam and Eve. Also, you'll notice that it says in verse 20 that he's a man of the soil, as was the case with Adam. Both of them were cultivators of the soil.

There may be an ironic connection between Noah's vine making the wine and the grape, the tree or product of the ground that Adam and Eve stumbled over. So, what I'm trying to say is that ironically, there was a tree involved in a vineyard involved in the fall of each of these two, the first Adam and now this new Adam. Also, there's a rivalry in their sons.

We have Cain and Abel and the murder against Abel. And then you have Seth. So, there are three sons named in the biblical account.

When it comes to Noah, there are also three sons, and there is rivalry, as we will find in verse 24. Following that emerges Ham versus the brothers. Now, in verse 21, we're told that we find that Noah drinks the wine and becomes drunk.

And then he uncovers himself in the midst of his tent. And so, what we have in this case is the sound of a similarity when it talks about how he lay uncovered inside his tent, with that of the tree that was in the midst of that's the word that's used here inside his tent. And then in the midst of the garden was the tree of good and evil.

And there is probably an intentional connection here. Now, Ham, the father of Cain, saw his father's nakedness and told his two brothers outside. What is at work here is the fifth commandment.

The fifth commandment of the 10 commandments is to honor your parents, your father, and your mother. And this is because God has given parents his authority to rear the family in the way of the Lord. So when you attack father and mother, you're really in essence, attacking God.

And so, whereas we find it difficult, that Ham saw the nakedness and then gossiped about it, that it would reserve a curse. In the eyes of the first readers of Genesis, this makes perfect sense because of the emphasis that is placed in their culture on the tradition of family loyalty, honoring the parent, recognizing the parents' authority, and submitting to the parents' instruction, all under the assumption, very importantly, that the parents are living in accord with wisdom, the fear of the Lord, they themselves living in the ways of the Lord, and then are leading their family, and then influencing the clan, and ultimately the tribe to lead them in a legacy toward

honoring God. So, by gossiping, then you find that there was a means of degrading Noah, and that authority lineage.

Now, in verse 23, we have, but see, a significant contrast between the treatment of Noah by Cain and the treatment of the two brothers, Shem and Japheth. Now, what they did was take extra steps to ensure that they would not even look upon the nakedness of their father. So, they took a garment, you in your mind's eye may imagine a blanket, and they draped it over their shoulders, with their face looking outward toward the door of the tent, and then they would back up so their eyes would be turned away from Noah.

And that's what we have in verse 23, where it says, Then they walked in backward and covered their father's nakedness. And the text you see is very specific to underscore that they did not see his nakedness. Their faces were turned the other way so they would not see their father's nakedness.

Now, because I think of cultural differences, a number of interpreters will try to make the sin of Ham even more egregious than what the text itself says because it again is difficult to understand, from our cultural perspective, how making fun of a father regarding his nakedness would mean such a hard response on the part of the father. I mean, after all, consider it: a father is not going to be cursing his son. He wants to bless his son.

He wants to see his son blessed under the hand of God, not to curse him. So, this would be a very strong reaction to Ham. So, let's make this the sin worse than it says in the text.

And some have suggested that what's at work here is some sort of homosexual act. Or that the language of exposing one's nakedness, as it is found in Leviticus 18, maybe there was on the part of Noah some kind of sexual indiscretion that was taking place in the tent. But what it says is sufficient for us to understand, and that is simply he was naked.

It wasn't just the nakedness, but rather the way that Ham responded by publicly ridiculing Noah's vulnerability. So, taking that into account, we want to see a second problem that we have as interpreters in our culture. What are we to make of Canaan as the object of the invocation, cursed be Canaan, as we find in verse 25?

Why is it if Ham is the one who committed the indiscretion against his father, why is the curse directed to Ham's son, Canaan? Well, what's at work here, I think, for us to understand is, as the proverbial statement says, like father like son. There is an assumption, which can be quite well validated through the biblical stories of family, that subsequent generations often imitate the sins of their parents and

grandparents. It's not an ethnicity issue but a moral issue that results in expulsion from the garden.

And then, as we find here, the curse that is directed against Canaan, Ham Canaan in their legacy, reminds us of Cain and how he was expelled from his region eastward. So it's not a matter of ethnicity, but moral conduct because of Canaanite culture, such as we read in Leviticus 18 and also Leviticus 20. There are many places where Canaanite culture describes the sexual immorality of the Canaanites.

In other words, what we have here is, in the curse and blessing, a map that would be helpful in understanding not the ethnicity but rather the moral depravity of the various people groups who emerged from the Hamites. So, we were told that there is this linkage, but you're not destined to imitate the sins of your parents. We know from two references in the prophets that there is personal accountability, that you suffer the consequences of your own behavior, not because of the behavior of your parents.

Although, as I commented, the influence is overwhelming, but it is not predetermined. Jeremiah 31 verses 29 and 30 and then Ezekiel chapter 18 verses 2 through 4 speak of individual accountability on the part of the people who were blaming their parents for the consequences of their own personal sinful condition. So we can see then why there would have been special interests in the Canaanites because there are references, well documented in the Bible, of the ongoing struggles between Israel and the Canaanites and how, ultimately, there was intermarriage that took place.

The degree of interaction between the Canaanites and the Israelites was such that the Israelites adopted and absorbed many Canaanite ideas, such as what you'll find with polytheism, worship of idols, polygamy, and what you will find with all kinds of sexual deviation. And as a result, they, too, just like the Canaanites, the predecessors of the Israelites, the Israelites themselves will experience expulsion. Now, let's move to the very important idea that we found in the description of this invocation.

Cursed be Canaan, we are told. And then in verse 26, Noah offers a blessing to the Lord, not directly to Shem and to Japheth, but rather he blesses the Lord. I think that Noah rightly understands, just as he has been preserved through the flood, that God will determine the destiny of Shem and Japheth.

And so, this is not a predetermined effort, but rather it is an invocation. It is a prayer. So, he calls upon God in verse 25, cursed be Canaan.

And then he makes it quite clear in verses 26 and 27 specifically, a blessing to the Lord. And what we have here is a hierarchy. You'll notice that Canaan is the lowest of slaves.

He will be to his brothers. And then what follows is the relationship of Japheth and the relationship of Japheth to each of his brothers. First in verse 27, may Japheth live in the tents of Shem.

And then may Canaan be his slave, or it could be translated as their slave. So the hierarchy is Japheth will be subject to Shem and then Ham will be subject to both of them. This will be spelled out in human history.

And we will find that as we have the unfolding story of Genesis, we will discover this great struggle between the Hamites and also the Shemites that will follow. And out of the Shemites, God's blessing would rest upon all peoples through Abraham, the one selected, chosen family to bring about this blessing for all peoples. And then you'll notice at the end of the chapter, that after chapter nine, we have the conclusion to the flood account.

This will be echoed by what we discovered in chapter five. So, if you want to hold your position there, let's look at chapter five and how it ends. Here we have this genealogy that is linear, naming one person per generation.

And we find that it is highly stylized. Each is said to die at a given age. And we have this refrain, and then he died, then he died, then he died.

And we come to Noah in verse 32. After Noah was 500 years old, he became the father of Shem, Ham, and Japheth. But what does not, what is not included is the language that is used for each of the predecessors of Noah, that he had other sons and daughters, that altogether he lived a certain number of years, and then he died.

Where do we find that? We find that in chapter nine, verses 28 and 29. After the flood, Noah lived 350 years. Altogether, Noah lived 950 years, and then he died.

See, this is the conclusion to the genealogy that is found in chapter five. So, what this means, in effect, is that this long account of the flood narrative is, in your thinking now, it's sandwiched inside the genealogy of chapter five and then is concluded at the end of chapter nine. So, what we have then is that the narrative offers an explanation of the genealogy, and in turn, the genealogy helps us to understand the importance of the narrative.

We know that Noah, in Jewish tradition, was a very important person in the flood, and Jewish tradition holds that Noah was an outstanding representative of righteousness and that Noah, in some sense, communicated righteousness in forewarning to the people of his day. You know, what is striking about Noah is that we never hear from Noah in the Genesis account until he speaks for the first time in the curse and blessing formulas for his sons. But when it comes to the New

Testament, we find that Genesis is supplemented by what we find in the New Testament, if you will find in 2 Peter chapter 2 verse 5, a description of Noah as a preacher of righteousness.

So, this would, and it makes sense, doesn't it, that he would have been engaged or speculating, but he, I mean, building a water vessel and claiming that there's going to be a worldwide cataclysm, and then we would expect him to be identified as a preacher of righteousness. So, if you take 2 Peter 2 verse 5 and chapter 3 verse 6, it pictures judgment against wicked teachers of Peter's day and the vindication or salvation of the Christians who are being opposed by these wicked false teachers. So, you can see where the flood narrative will serve as an excellent example of the judgment of God against the wicked.

In 1 Peter chapter 3, verses 20 through 21 refer to Noah. Noah corresponds to Christ in the present, as Peter would have understood it, the eschatological age. In other words, the end time was underway in Peter's mind, and he drew on this analogy of Noah and God's judgment that an eschatological time at the end of the world would be brought about by Christ.

When it comes to preserving Noah with reference to the resurrection, he describes baptism. Baptism in waters would mean death. Submerging oneself into the waters signals spiritual death, just like Noah experienced a physical dying in a symbol and hence a spiritual dying in a symbol.

Then, emerging from the ark of protection is indicative, depicted by again symbol, by picture, a new life, a life that would produce all the peoples of the earth. And so, Noah then would be seen as a positive example of preserving God's people, Christians, either in resisting wicked teaching that was misleading and its oppression, and also by joining in the imagery of baptism, how Christians would be preserved in the last times by Christ. Next time, in session nine, we will look at the next superscription, the account of Shem, Ham, and Japheth, in chapter 10.

These would be the generations, and this would include the Table of Nations. In chapter 11, attendant to the Table of Nations will be the story of the tower of Babylon.

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