

Dr. Robert Vannoy, Genesis, Session 15, Podcast Audio

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Welcome to the Deep Dive. Looks like we're diving deep into the Genesis flood narrative today. Always a fascinating topic.

Yeah. And we're going beyond just the surface level. Right.

We're going to compare it with those ancient Mesopotamian flood stories too. Especially the Babylonian ones. The Babylonian versions.

Yeah. This is going to be a fascinating comparison. Really is.

I think we're going to find some surprising parallels for sure. Parallels. Yeah.

And some really thought-provoking differences. For sure. Okay.

So let's jump right in. Okay. With the biblical flood narrative itself.

You can find this in Genesis chapter six through nine. Right. And we're dealing with a righteous man, Noah, living in a world just absolutely steeped in wickedness.

Steeped in wickedness. It's pervasive. Yeah.

So bad that God decides, like, okay, we need a hard reset here. Yep. A hard reset.

Got to start over. A fresh start. And he instructs Noah to build an ark- right.

To preserve his family and a sampling of all the animals- you are in the impending deluge. From this crazy flood. Yeah.

And it wasn't just a typical flood. Oh, definitely not. Like a yearly overflow of the riverbanks or something like that.

Right. The text describes it lasting over a year. A whole year.

A full year and 10 days. Wow. Indicating a truly catastrophic event.

So this is like- really reshaped the world. Yeah. This is a whole new era.

Absolutely. It's not just a flood. Yeah.

It makes you wonder, like, when did this even happen? Well, that's the tricky thing about using biblical genealogies to date events in the Old Testament. Right. There are gaps in the lineages and various interpretations of the time periods involved.

Yeah. And it makes it difficult to pinpoint the exact timing of the flood. So we may not know exactly when, but we do know from Genesis that there was a specific cause.

Definitely a specific cause. Genesis 6:5 to 8. It doesn't- listen. Hold back.

It really doesn't mince words when it describes just how pervasive this wickedness was. Yeah. It talks about the evil being ingrained in their very thoughts and actions.

Right. The imagination of the thoughts of his heart. Evil continually.

Evil continually. Yeah. This wasn't just like a couple of bad apples.

A few bad actors. No. This was like- a deep-rooted, widespread corruption.

The whole system was messed up. Yeah. And that leads us to this really interesting passage- oh, yeah.

That comes right before the flood narrative really kicks off. In Genesis 6.1 to 4, the story of the sons of God and the daughters of men. Oh, this is a passage that has sparked a lot of debate.

So much debate. Over the centuries. For sure.

Yeah. I think given our focus on the Old Testament and really its historical context, we can kind of- we could probably- set aside the mythological approach. Set that one aside.

Yeah. The one that- Dismisses it as just a borrowed myth. Yeah.

Yeah. I think we can move on from that. Okay.

But what about the angel view? The angel view? That's always been a popular one. Yeah. Fallen angels having children with human women.

Right. Yeah. This has been a popular interpretation, especially in early Christian thought.

Okay. But it does face some challenges. Such as? Well, for one, the text focuses on God's judgment being directed at humans.

Okay. Not angels. Not the angels.

And also the concept of angels engaging in sexual relationships is not really- it's not typical. Typical in Hebrew thought. Okay.

So- it's got some problems. It's got some holes in it. Yeah.

Yeah. So what about the Sethite view then? Okay. The Sethite view.

This is the one that suggests that the sons of God are descendants of Seth. Okay. Adam and Eve's righteous son.

Right. And the daughters of men are from the line of Cain. From the line of Cain.

The bad guy. Right. And it argues that intermarriage between these lines corrupted the godly Sethite line.

Okay. So that's where the wickedness comes in. That's where the wickedness comes in.

Gotcha. But this interpretation also has some issues. Like? It forces two different meanings onto the Hebrew word Hadam.

Which means? Which means mankind. Okay. In consecutive verses.

Okay. Which doesn't quite hold up. Okay.

Yeah. So two down. Two down, two to go.

Two to go, right? Okay. What's next? The kingship view is the fourth interpretation. Okay.

And it's the one that seems to have the strongest support. Interesting. Okay.

It argues that the sons of God weren't actually divine beings. Okay. But powerful human kings.

Okay. So remember, in many ancient Near Eastern cultures. Right.

Rulers were often referred to as sons of gods. Right. They were like the intermediaries between the gods and the people.

Exactly. Okay. So are we saying these kings, they were like going on power trips fueled by- it seems to be the implication.

Okay. And the evidence for this interpretation is really quite strong. Interesting.

The term Bene HaElohim, literally sons of the gods. Right. Was commonly used for dynastic rulers in various ancient cultures.

Like? Egypt, Sumer, and the Hittites, for example. Wow. This is really- it's a widespread concept.

It's a widespread concept. Yeah. That's fascinating.

Yeah. If the sons of God were these powerful kings, how does that connect to the violence that's mentioned in Genesis 6.1 to 13? Well, this view suggests that the Nephilim and the Giborim- often translated as? Giants. Okay.

That might've been a warrior class. Okay. That emerged from these polygamous unions.

So adding to the overall wickedness and the violence. Adding to all the problems. Gotcha.

So you have these kings consolidating power, taking multiple wives. And possibly contributing to social unrest and violence. Yeah.

It's kind of a recipe for disaster. It really is. The flood.

Yeah. It's almost like- it makes sense. It makes sense when you look at it that way.

Yeah. Yeah. So while it's hard to be 100% certain, the kingship view- it's compelling.

Yeah. It definitely seems like a really compelling and historically sound- it's definitely historically sound. Explanation for this- for this mysterious passage.

Mysterious passage, for sure. Yeah. And this focus on kingship and divine authority also appears in Babylonian flood narratives where the gods display a real preoccupation with their power and status.

It's a far cry from the single all-powerful god we find in Genesis, right? It is a very different conception of the divine. What kinds of things are these Babylonian gods squabbling about? Well, in the Babylonian account, the god Enlil decides to send the flood. Okay.

Because he's fed up with the noise and the commotion of humanity. Really? It's almost as if he's an irritated neighbor calling the authorities to complain about a loud party. So, humanity's crime is basically just being a nuisance.

That seems to be the gist of it. That's certainly different from the pervasive wickedness that triggers the flood in Genesis. It's a different set of priorities, for sure.

And what about the characters who are chosen to survive? Is there a difference there as well? Absolutely. In the Epic of Gilgamesh, the hero, Adepishtim, is chosen because of his wisdom and his cunning. So, he's a little bit of a trickster.

He's a trickster. He tricks the gods into revealing their plans. Manages to build his ark in secret.

So, he outsmarts them? He outsmarts them. He's a survivor. He's a survivor.

Noah, on the other hand, is chosen for his righteousness. Chosen for his righteousness. Which highlights, I think, a key difference in how these stories portray that relationship between humanity and the divine.

Exactly. The Babylonian account really emphasizes outsmarting the gods, you know? Playing the game. Playing the game to survive.

Gotta do what you got to do. The Genesis narrative focuses on obedience and faithfulness to a just and merciful god. It really does feel like these flood narratives represent two totally different- contrasting- worldviews.

Yeah. Contrasting worldviews, for sure. Yeah.

One based on this transactional relationship with these capricious deities. Right. And the other on this covenant relationship with a sovereign and righteous god.

Yeah. That's really interesting. And it's interesting how those differences in worldview kind of extend to the aftermath of the flood, too.

They really do. In the Babylonian account, the gods end up regretting their decision to send the flood. They do.

Primarily because now they're missing out on all the sacrifices humans used to offer them. Oh, so it's like they disrupted their own system. They disrupted their own divine order.

They shot themselves in the foot. It's like they overplayed their hand. They overplayed their hand, and now they're suffering the consequences.

It's a lot different from the covenant God makes with Noah. Very different. In Genesis, where God promises to never again destroy the world with a flood.

Right. And sets a rainbow in the sky as a sign of this promise. It's such a powerful symbol.

Powerful symbol of hope and reconciliation. Yeah. It's very different.

It really makes you think about the different ways humans have tried to understand. And cope with. Yeah.

And cope with these disasters and suffering throughout history. Right? Absolutely. The flood serves as such a powerful symbol of both destruction and renewal.

And not just physically, but spiritually as well. Right. Yeah.

It's like this physical cleansing, but also- spiritual cleansing. Spiritual cleansing. A new beginning.

It's a reset button. It is. So what does all of this mean for us today? Why should we even care about these ancient flood stories? That's a great question.

I mean, these stories might seem like relics of a distant past. Right. They seem so far removed.

But they actually hold a lot of relevance for us. I think so too. For one thing, they give us a window into this rich tapestry of human thought and storytelling.

Right. They remind us of the questions that we wrestle with today- the nature of good and evil, the role of suffering- the meaning of life. The meaning of life and death.

These have captivated humanity for millennia. It's like we're all participating in this ongoing dialogue. This ongoing dialogue that's been going on for centuries, trying to make sense of our existence.

Exactly. Trying to understand our place in this grand scheme of things. And it seems like these flood stories, while separated by time and culture, all grapple with this mystery.

Yeah. They really do. Yeah.

And they challenge us to examine our own beliefs and values too. They do. How do we view the divine? What's our understanding of human nature? What do we believe about- What do we believe about the possibility of redemption and hope? These are big questions.

They're big questions. Right. And it's like we're holding a mirror up to ourselves and seeing our own reflections.

Through the lens of these ancient narratives. Yeah. Gaining a new perspective on our own beliefs.

Yeah. It's fascinating to see how these flood narratives, while sharing this common theme, offer such distinct viewpoints on the same event. Right.

And how those differences really reflect the unique worldviews of the cultures that produce them. Exactly. For example, the Babylonian flood stories- right.

Tend to portray the gods as capricious and often fallible, constantly vying for power, making mistakes that they sometimes regret. It's almost like watching a cosmic drama. A cosmic drama unfolds.

Filled with intrigue and power struggles. Like we see in human societies. Exactly.

It suggests a worldview where humans are really at the mercy of these unpredictable and potentially dangerous forces. So survival hinges on cunning and a bit of luck. Yeah.

Got to be in the right place at the right time, I guess. You got to play your cards, right? Exactly. And this contrasts so sharply with the Genesis flood narrative, which presents this different view of the divine.

It really does. Yeah. The God of Genesis is sovereign.

Right. He's purposeful, and ultimately he's merciful. He judges wickedness, but he also provides a path to redemption.

Yeah. And that raises a really important question. How do these contrasting portrayals of the divine affect our understanding of humanity's place in the world? That's a profound observation.

It's like looking through two different lenses- yeah. To understand reality. Right.

One is clouded with fear and uncertainty, and the other offers this vision of hope and purpose. It's a very different way of seeing the world. And that's what makes exploring these ancient narratives so compelling.

They challenge us. They really challenge us. To confront our assumptions about the world- yeah.

And the forces that shape our lives. I have to admit, this deep dive has been a real eye-opener for me. It has been for me too.

I feel like I've gained a whole new appreciation for the complexity- and the depth. And depth of these ancient flood stories. Yeah.

Absolutely. It's been a pleasure exploring these captivating tales with you. Likewise.

And I'm sure you, dear listener, have your own thoughts and questions swirling after this deep dive. For sure. And that's the beauty of it.

We're not just passively absorbing information. We're actively engaging with these stories, wrestling with their complexities and letting them ignite our own curiosity. Exactly.

It's fascinating how these flood narratives both illuminate and transcend their specific cultural contexts. They do. They offer us glimpses into the beliefs and values of the people who told and retold them.

Right. But they also tap into these universal human experiences and anxieties. Yeah.

Like if we connect this to the bigger picture, it raises some interesting questions about that relationship between myth and history. It does. Are these stories simply fictional tales? Or do they contain echoes of actual events? It's a debate.

It's a debate that scholars have been grappling with for ages. For a long time. Yeah.

Yeah. And perhaps the most important takeaway isn't necessarily whether or not these floods literally happened. Right.

But what they reveal about. The human psyche. Our connection with nature.

Right. And our constant quest for meaning. Yeah.

It's like these stories are tapping into something deep within us. Something primal and timeless. That continues to resonate even thousands of years after they were first told.

Exactly. That's what makes them so compelling. You know, it's amazing how these flood narratives.

Yeah. They come from different cultures, different time periods. Totally.

But they all share that common thread. Yeah. Of humanity facing this just absolutely world-altering catastrophe.

It's a universal theme. It is. And it makes you wonder, right? It does.

Are these stories just echoes of this distant shared memory? Right. Or are they something deeper? Yeah. Is it like a universal fear? Yeah.

Like a primal fear. Yeah. Fascination with this destructive power of nature.

It's a question that scholars and thinkers have been wrestling with. Forever. For centuries.

Yeah. Are these stories purely symbolic? Right. Or do they actually have like kernels of historical truth in there? It's a tough one to answer.

It is. Maybe it's a bit of both. Yes.

I mean, even if we can't definitively prove that there was one single global flood event. Right. We know that floods have been a recurring threat throughout human history.

Oh, for sure. You know, they've shaped landscapes, civilizations. Our collective imagination.

Absolutely. Our collective imagination. Yeah.

It's almost like that fear of being overwhelmed by nature is woven into our DNA. It's like a primal fear. Yeah.

And these stories, whether or not they're based on actual events, they serve as a way for us to kind of process those fears. Right. To make sense of them.

To make sense of this chaotic force that could disrupt our lives at any moment. And they also provide a framework for understanding our relationship with the divine. You know, with the powers that we believe are shaping our destiny.

It's interesting if you notice in the Babylonian narratives, the gods are often just as susceptible to those chaotic forces as humans are. They are. They're afraid of the flood.

They regret their actions. They're constantly scrambling for control. So they're not all-powerful.

No, they're not all-powerful. Kind of. They're flawed.

Yeah. They make mistakes. It's like they're mirroring the anxieties and the uncertainties of the people who created these stories.

Absolutely. In contrast to that, the god of Genesis. Yeah.

He stands apart. He transcends the chaos. He's in control.

He's purposeful. And his actions are driven by... A higher moral order. Higher moral order.

Yeah. It's a completely different way of looking at it. It's a very different perspective.

It is. And it suggests that the ancient Israelites had developed a very different understanding of the divine than their Babylonian neighbors. And that understanding shapes not only their interpretation of the flood, but their whole worldview.

Really, their whole way of looking at the world. Their whole way of seeing reality. Yeah.

So even though both of these flood narratives share a common theme, they offer very different answers. Very different answers. Yeah.

To the question of why do these things happen? Right. Like why is there suffering? Why is there... What does it mean? What does it mean for humanity? What does it mean for us? Yeah. The Babylonian narratives kind of suggest that we're at the mercy of these capricious and unpredictable forces.

Okay. Like fate. Yeah.

Like fate. Okay. And the Genesis narrative points to this god who is just and merciful.

Right. And ultimately in control. And ultimately in control.

I got to say, this deep dive has been amazing. It has been fascinating. I feel like I've learned so much about the Genesis flood narrative, and especially comparing it.

Especially in comparison. Yeah. With the Babylonian accounts.

Absolutely. It's fascinating how these seemingly simple stories can bring up such profound questions. Yeah.

About the human condition, our relationship with the divine. The nature of existence itself. It's mind-blowing.

It really is. It's been a pleasure exploring all of this with you. Likewise.

The pleasure's all mine. And I'm sure you, dear listener, have your own thoughts and questions after this deep dive. Oh, I hope so.

That's the beauty of these ancient narratives. It is. They invite us to continue the conversation.

To keep thinking about it. Yeah. To grapple with these timeless questions.

Yeah. And to find our own meaning. Our own place.

Within this grand sweep of human history and storytelling. So until next time, keep exploring, keep questioning, and keep diving deep into this world of ancient wisdom. Happy diving, everyone.