

Notes on Genesis 3
God Will Never Do That Again!
(Genesis 6:5-11:26)
Fretheim Explores Genesis,
Luther Productions, St. Paul, 2000

The Story of Noah's Ark

God also remembers the animals.

- The number of animals taken onto the ark
 - Was there one pair or seven pairs? Some sections of the text suggest the latter.
 - Note that Noah sacrifices one of every type of animal when they get off the ark, so if there was only one pair of animals . . .
- God remembers the animals
 - God decides to save not only human beings, but animals wild and domestic
 - After the flood, God promises never to respond to sin in an annihilating action like a flood again. This is a promise *to all flesh* (human beings and animals)
- So what do we do with animals in “ark-like” situations?
 - Text suggests: we should bring them on the ark.

The Rainbow in the Sky

- note the Rainbow in the sky is a sign *for God* to remember his covenant with creation

Human Sin and the Cosmic Order

- Moral order effects cosmic order.
 - Human sin causes the ground to produce thistles and thorns
 - In particular, the text speaks of human violence and its effects on the cosmic order. “Human violence begets cosmic violence.” (Genesis 6:11-12).
- God as Mediator of the Effects of Sin
 - Moral order effects cosmic order, and so the flood actually grows out of human sin. God does not trigger the flood. The flood is an example of the effects of sin – the flowering, the consequence of sin on the cosmic order. God is involved as judge and mediator of the effects of sin.

Relationship of the Story Noah and the Ark to Other Ancient Flood Stories

- There is a great similarity with some other ancient flood stories. The Gilgamesh Epic for example has hero taking animals on a boat in a great flood
- The bible story here reflects a common tradition of a great flood story, told in the light of Israel's understanding of God.
 - Israel's knowledge of these other flood stories should be expected:
 - Abraham originated in the Mesopotamia
 - Israel lay on the travel route between the two major ancient civilization: Egypt, and Mesopotamia.

A Worldwide Flood?

- The bible story describes a “world-wide flood,” however the “world” of the ancients much smaller than the world we know of today
- Archeological examination of silt levels shows there was a major flood in the Mesopotamian valley about 3000 B.C.

God’s Response to the Sin of Noah’s Time: insight into the mind and heart and nature of God

- God regrets, grieves for having made the world in the first place
- Text presents to us a God who has emotion, who feels deeply. The “outer judgment is not matched by an inner harshness.”
- A God who regrets and grieves cannot be the impassible God of Greeks, but is a God who truly has emotions, who truly suffers.
- A God who regrets cannot be a God who knew for sure what was going to happen.

What Did the Flood Accomplish?

- 1. Cleanse the World?
 - A cleansing of the world with water?
 - But after the flood we have Genesis 8:21: “the inclination of the human heart is evil from youth.” The flood did not “cleanse” human sinfulness!
- 2. Undo the Old Creation and Begin Again?
 - Water destroys the world, returning it to a watery chaos reminiscent of the first chapter of Genesis
 - While it is a new beginning, it is not a *radical* new beginning. The world is pretty much the same after the flood as before
 - Does offer insight into God: God is willing to begin again
 - Personal significance in our individual lives: the lives of all of us have stories where God could just wash his hands of us. Instead, God is willing to begin again
- 3. Warn us of the Power of God’s Divine Judgment?
 - But God promises he will never do this again, come what may. So this is not a *typical* example of God’s Judgment – but rather a unique example.
 - God’s promise not to respond to sin in such an annihilating fashion is a *limitation* of God’s power.
 - This promise recalls the story of Jesus after a town rejects him and his disciples. (Luke 9:51-56). The disciples offers to call down fire from heaven on the town, but Jesus rebukes them.
- So what has changed after the flood? Creation is largely the same, and the human heart remains inclined to evil. Answer: God has changed.
 - God understands that “human beings are hopeless” (Brueggemann): they will always be inclined to sin and evil
 - God resolves to take on a new relationship with creation, and a new way of engaging evil.
 - “The God-world relation is not simply that of strong God and needy world. Now it is a tortured relation between a grieved God and a resistant world.” God chooses to suffer and endure a wicked world, continuing to open up his divine heart to the world.

The Tower of Babel Story

Interpretations

- 1. Story of human pride, trying to reach the heavens and become like God
- 2. God's response to the human temptation to isolate themselves from the larger world, refusing to "fill the earth"
 - God's giving of different languages has the effect of forcing humanity to scatter. It is less a judgment than an attempt to get human beings to fill the earth.
 - God creates diversity.
 - Implications for the Unity of the Church: God will act to promote diversity over any form of unity that seeks to preserve itself in isolation to the outside world

References

- Video series: **Fretheim Explores Genesis**. Luther Productions. St. Paul. 2000 (Available from: <http://www.lutherproductions.com/bibleseries.htm#bible2>)
- "The Book of Genesis. Introduction, Commentary, and Reflections." Terence E. Fretheim. In: **The New Interpreter's Bible, A Commentary in Twelve Volumes, Volume I**. Abingdon Press, Nashville, 1994.
- **Genesis. Interpretation. A Bible Commentary for Teaching and Preaching**. Walter Brueggemann, John Know Press, Atlanta, 1982.