

SESSION 43: A HARD GRACE

Genesis 6:5-10

September 22, 2024

PREFACE

In our last session we looked at the forest instead of the individual trees regarding the Flood narrative. It is time now to return to working through the text.

Verses 1-4 of Chapter Six set the stage for Yahweh's impending judgment against mankind—but not just humans; His judgment will fall upon the beasts of the earth, the fowl in the sky, and the very earth itself. All outside the ark, except the creatures in the sea, will be either destroyed or changed. Man has reached such a level of depravity and evil that Yahweh will wipe clean the slate and begin again from the family of the lone righteous man on the earth, Noah, and the animals he has sheltered in the ark.

In His longsuffering and grace, the Lord God has given man 120 years to change his ways (v3), but he has not. So the judgment will proceed.

Read Genesis 6:5-8.

v5

Then Yahweh saw that the evil of man was great on the earth, and that every intent of the thoughts of his heart was only evil continually.

I take it that v5 describes the mind of Yahweh 120 years after v3. He sees that man not only has *not* repented, but has grown worse in the ensuing years. As we discussed last week, we would be hard-pressed to find a more thorough and discouraging description of human-kind than we have here.

“the **evil** of man was **great**” (abundant evil)

“on the **earth**” (the *whole* earth)

“**every** intent”

“of the **thoughts of his heart**” (from the core of his being)

“**only evil continually**”

Again, this is not a reference to man's physical heart, the organ, but to "the fountain of life in the blood, and therefore for life, or the principle of natural life... the seat of feeling and affections" (Wilson). God's word repeatedly cites the "heart" as the source from which our thoughts, our ideas, our plans emanate, as in Proverbs 19:21.

**Many thoughts [or plans] are in a man's heart,
But it is the counsel of Yahweh that will stand.**

I said before that this verse, like many others in Genesis, mirrors the events and dark energies of the Eschaton. Turn please to Revelation 16. There will come a point in the final days when seven bowls of God's wrath will be poured out upon the earth; these will be seven sequential and horrific plagues inflicted upon mankind—this is commonly referred to as The Third Woe. (As the name implies, this is the third—and worst—woe to be inflicted after two others that were bad enough in themselves.) This takes place near the climactic end of the seven year Tribulation. I want to read this now—not necessarily to relate the astounding plagues that are poured out upon the earth, but to show the response of the wicked people left on earth. Let me begin reading at the fourth bowl.

Read Revelation 16:8-21.

Mankind on earth will have suffered through three and a half years of life under the satanic rule of Antichrist, and through repeated demonstrations of God's judgment upon it and them. On earth, evil is not just dominate—it is the law of the land. Finally, God gives man one last chance to repent of its evil and turn to Him before the Final Judgment.

Instead, they blaspheme His name and refuse to acknowledge His glory—just as they did in the time of Noah.

v6

And Yahweh regretted that He had made man on the earth, and He was grieved in His heart.

I have said that there are times when we must, by necessity, anthropomorphize our God just to understand His ways and His character. Here, however, we *dare not* do that.

If we read v6 as if we were reading about a human being, we miss its meaning entirely. The first important Hebrew word is *nahem* (nee-HAM), translated, unfortunately, in the KJV as “repented.” In this Church Age we understand “repent” (Greek, *metanoeo*) to mean to change one’s mind or purpose, i.e., to turn and go in a different direction.

Were we to apply this familiar definition to Yahweh—that He suddenly decides to change His purpose—we undermine what Scripture reveals about not just who God is, but how He behaves, and how His Creation is not a momentary, day-by-day experiment, but an exquisite, minutely planned and executed system arcing from Genesis 1 to Revelation 22.

The word in Genesis 6 means to comfort, to feel sorry about something, to console oneself. There is a tenuous connection between the two, but the other versions of our Bible use English words more clearly understood today: regretted, was sorry, was grieved. The second word, also translated “grieved” in most of our versions is a different Hebrew word: *aseb* (ahts-EV), but related in that the second word is, in a sense, the result of the first. Interestingly, *aseb* can also be translated “carve”; that is, to shape or fashion as one would carve a statue. So here is the idea of something sharp, something painfully stabbing a person all the way down to the core of his being.

K&D: The force of “it repented the Lord,” may be gathered from the explanatory “it grieved Him at His heart.” This shows that the repentance of God does not presuppose any variableness in His nature of His purposes. In this sense God never repents of anything (1Sam. 15:29)... The repentance of God is an anthropomorphic expression for the pain of the divine love at the sin of man, and signifies that “God is hurt no less by the atrocious sins of men than if they pierced His heart with mortal anguish” (Calvin).

As we discussed at the end of class last week, it is not that Yahweh God, ignorant of how mankind would turn out, felt bad that it had gone the way it did, but that His created beings, given a form of free will to make decisions in their lives, had indeed taken the path God knew they would.

I would suggest that what we witness in v6 is just another form of God's mercy and grace—which is His singular distinction as a god. 📌 Even though He knew man would take this course—falling into abject depravity and disgrace and deserving of nothing less than being extinguished from the face of the earth—this produces not glib satisfaction that He had been right all along, but painful anguish in His heart, a deep level of sadness and regret that He would now have to *destroy* the very core of His Creation.

vv7-8

I believe we see this mercy, this compassion being played out in v7 even as Yahweh plans for the destruction of all mankind and the beasts that live with him.

And Yahweh said, "I will blot out man whom I have created from the face of the land, from man to animals to creeping things and to birds of the sky; for I regret that I have made them."

There are times in the study of God's word that we must digest a passage a bit more challenging than others. Here it is easy enough to understand what is being said, but what is more difficult is wrapping *our* minds around the mind and heart of Almighty God in this moment.

It is typical, and understandable, to read anger and wrath in the resolution of this verse. It is more difficult to read what I believe to be sorrow and grace. For in this destruction of the old we see a gracious *second chance* for the new. Thinking of this in human terms, Yahweh God could have turned to the other members of the Trinity and said something like, *Well, that didn't work. Let's just throw it all away and return to enjoying Our glory among Ourselves.*

But He didn't say anything like that. As He will throughout the rest of the life of man upon this earth, He instead shows grace, giving man another chance.

But Noah found favor in the eyes of Yahweh.

Yes, people and animals will indeed die. They will perish. But man and animals *as species* will be given another chance. And here the KJVs are to be preferred. There is nothing wrong with the translation "favor" for the Hebrew *chen* (chen), but "grace" in the KJVs speaks volumes for what is going on here.

I have said many times before in our studies, there is no God like Yahweh. Yes, we know there are *literally* no other gods. But throughout the history of man—especially *ancient* history—there have been "small-g" gods. And none of them—not one—was like the compassionate, loving, gracious, merciful **one God**, Yahweh.

Alfred Edersheim: It brings before our minds “the sorrow of Divine love over the sins of man,” in the words of Calvin, “that when the terrible sins of man offend God, it is not otherwise than as if His heart had been wounded by extreme sorrow.”

v9

These are the generations of Noah. Noah was a righteous man, blameless among those in his generations; Noah walked with God.

Edersheim: It needs no more than simply to put together the notices of Noah, in the order in which Scripture places them: “But Noah found grace in the eyes of Jehovah;” and again: “Noah was a just man, and perfect”—as the Hebrew word implies, spiritually upright, genuine, inwardly entire and complete, one whose heart had a single aim—“in his generations,” or among his contemporaries; and lastly, “Noah walked with God,”—this expression being the same as in the case of Enoch.

Not to disagree with Edersheim (where he says, “It needs no more...”), but I think we can add just a few more thoughts on this passage. Another reason why I prefer the KJV “grace” in v8 is that it keeps v9 in proper perspective for us.

Noah was not in possession of a supernatural, other-worldly piety; the scene at the end of Chapter Nine will make this clear. As Leupold points out, when the Bible states that a person is “righteous,” “blameless,” “perfect” or “complete,” it means that those things God seeks or desires in man are present—and they are indeed present in Noah. These descriptive words “cover a state approximating perfection as nearly as man can.”

Enoch, Noah, Abraham and others “walked with God” and were declared “blameless.” This surely revealed in them a level of faith and righteous obedience that we all could and should emulate. Yet even as we do this we dare not miss the *grace* that is part of the equation.

I have mentioned the grace of God that will preserve Noah and his family through the Flood, but there is grace here as well, for no man—*no* man or woman—can meet God’s definition of holiness. For Him to accept us, for Him to grant us the privilege to “walk with” Him requires His unmerited, undeserving grace.

To state it boldly, it was not his level of faith that saved Noah; it was God’s *grace* bestowed upon him that saved him.

For this study I was reacquainted with that venerable scholar of Scripture, Alfred Edersheim (1825-1889) and his one-volume *Old Testament Bible History* (1876), which was one of the first Bible reference works placed on my library shelf in the early eighties.

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Setting the Stage

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