

The Flood

SCOTT HOEZEE

Theologian, Neal Plantinga, once noted that in history, sinfulness has been described by the Latin phrase: *series calamitatis*; or a long string of calamity; or simply put, as bad momentum. Well, in the Bible, the original sin soon gives way to murder, and sin then takes off so fast that after only five chapters, the world has flat out broken God's heart. God's response was a deluge—a flood. Today on *Groundwork*, we will look at this well-known story. Stay tuned.

DAVE BAST

From Words of Hope and ReFrame Media, this is *Groundwork*, where we dig into scripture to lay the foundation for our lives. I am Dave Bast.

SCOTT HOEZEE

And I am Scott Hoezee; and Dave, we are welcoming folks to this program number four in a five-part series we are doing on the earliest stories in the Bible...the first eleven chapters; sometimes called the prehistory of the world contained in Genesis 1 through 11. So, we looked at the story of creation in Genesis 1 and 2; we looked at the story of the story of...the tragic story of the fall into sin in Genesis 3; the spread of sin in Genesis 4 with Cain and Abel and the first murder; and now, we are going to come to, in this program, Genesis 6 through 9.

DAVE BAST

Exactly; and you know, they are wonderful stories. I have been having a lot of fun just rereading them, thinking through them; you know, they are very familiar to many of us from Sunday school days. They are real stories, I think, things that really happened to real people. I think the Bible makes it clear that Adam and Eve and Cain and Abel were real individuals; but as we look deeper into the text and into the meaning and the intent of the author, sometimes we find things are a little more complicated than they seemed when we were children in Sunday school. So, it is good to wrestle with these things. Often they raise questions that we cannot fully answer, but the same is probably true with today's story, the story of the flood.

SCOTT HOEZEE

Right; and the one thing that we know from early Genesis is that we do have a very, very brief time in a sinless world; but it did not last. We only get two chapters of that; and after that, as we have said on previous programs, Dave, it is pretty much the world we know—a world full of sin and evil.

DAVE BAST

Yes; in the last program, we looked at the first crime; the murder of Abel by his brother, Cain; and as you turn the page again, from Genesis 4 into Genesis 5, and even the rest of Chapter 4, things just go downhill...

SCOTT HOEZEE

Yes.

DAVE BAST

You know, like you said, bad momentum...

SCOTT HOEZEE

Exactly.

DAVE BAST

It gets worse and worse. So, we are introduced to this character, Lamech, who brags how much worse he is than Cain, you know.

SCOTT HOEZEE

Yes, how many murders he committed.

DAVE BAST

Exactly.

SCOTT HOEZEE

Just horrible! Like terrible, R-rated stuff. So, things are going bad. Now, what is interesting is that initially in Genesis, God, actually, all things being equal, responds to sin, and even to the murder of Abel, in a rather restrained way...a very gracious way. He does not wipe out Adam and Eve; he promises them a redeemer, even, eventually; and then makes clothing for them. He doesn't murder Cain on account of Cain's being a murderer. He doesn't wipe out Cain, he speaks graciously to Cain—gives him a mark to protect him so his own life will be spared...

DAVE BAST

He does send him into exile...

SCOTT HOEZEE

He does go into exile, but his life is spared...

DAVE BAST

Right, yes.

SCOTT HOEZEE

You would think God might just sort of say: Ah...you know...so, God is pretty gracious, but things, as you just said, Dave, get much worse...

DAVE BAST

Yes.

SCOTT HOEZEE

In the end of Genesis 4, and certainly into Genesis 5, and that brings us, then, to the beginning of Genesis 6.

DAVE BAST

^{6:5}The Lord saw that the wickedness of humankind was great in the earth, and that every inclination of the thoughts of their hearts was only evil continually. ⁶And the Lord was sorry that he had made humankind on the earth, and it grieved him to his heart. ⁷So the Lord said, "I will blot out from the earth the human beings I have created; people, together with animals and creeping things and birds of the air, for I am sorry that I have made them."

SCOTT HOEZEE

So, that is Genesis 6:5-7; and the thing I think we want to note first, Dave, is that despite sort of a popular misconception...maybe we even picked this up in our Sunday school days, if we went to Sunday school as kids...a popular misconception is that the flood came because God was angry.

DAVE BAST

Yes.

SCOTT HOEZEE

He is like Zeus; some angry Greek God unleashing lightning bolts from, you know...

DAVE BAST

Right.

SCOTT HOEZEE

From the heavens to punish these people; but there is no talk of anger in Genesis 6, only of grief and of heartbreak.

DAVE BAST

Yes; sorrow is the overwhelming emotion of God. Just a note here about the language...the depiction of God. It is dramatic; it is even daring; I think I would use that word. It is a daring picture of God, who seems to be regretting the fact that he had created the world at all; in fact, he says flat out: I am sorry I made them...and the animals, too, and the birds and the plants are all going to be involved in the judgment on human sin; but this is dramatic language that the Bible uses elsewhere speaking of God repenting of things...

SCOTT HOEZEE

Right.

DAVE BAST

And it is intended to convey a very powerful point about God's emotional reaction against sin; but this is not the place to try to piece together the changelessness of the nature of God, and these other theological concepts that we have about God's being.

SCOTT HOEZEE

Yes, the Bible...the narrators of scripture do not seem to be too worried about philosophical preconceptions of whether or not God can have emotion or change. We will see that later in the program, even; but, it is grief, not anger. The text is very clear on that. Now, as we are also going to take note of at the end of this program, Dave, this is still a terrible story of huge loss of life; and so, claiming that it was grief not anger maybe does not quite soften how terrible the story is...because it is a terrible story.

DAVE BAST

No, but you know, that is God's overwhelming emotion, though...

SCOTT HOEZEE

Yes, it is.

DAVE BAST

In the face of human sin and rebellion, it breaks his heart. You know, you just think about that. Through our own actions, we can grieve the heart of God.

SCOTT HOEZEE

Yes; so God is...he kind of wants to start over, but not quite start over, because there is a good man, a man named Noah; and God is going to preserve a sliver of his creation and of humanity. So, it is not a complete start...God is not going to reduce the earth to a cinder, recreate it and start with a new Adam and Eve; not quite.

So, here we get this in Genesis 6, beginning at verse 18:

(God says) "I will establish my covenant with you, Noah, and you shall come into the ark—you, and your sons, your wife, and your sons' wives with you; ¹⁹and of every living thing of all flesh, you shall bring two

of every kind into the ark to keep them alive with you; they shall be male and female. ²⁰Of the birds according to their kind; and of animals according to their kind; of every creeping thing on the ground according to its kind; two of every kind shall come into you to keep them alive; ²¹and also take with you every kind of food that is eaten, store it up and it shall serve as food for you and for them. ²²Noah did this. He did all that God commanded him.

DAVE BAST

Right; so, here is Noah, the one righteous man...and incidentally, we mentioned in the program on Cain and Abel that Abel's righteousness was based on his faith—his commitment to God—his belief and trust as proved in his actions; and with Noah it is the same thing. In Hebrews 11 we are told that it was faith that allowed Noah to be pleasing to God, and he demonstrated his faith by doing what God told him to do. He went and built an ark; and of course, you know, the Bible tells that story, and it tells it at great length—how Noah spent years and years and years...

SCOTT HOEZEE

Right.

DAVE BAST

Constructing this big boat.

SCOTT HOEZEE

Right; so, there is the setup for the story. God is grieved—he is heartbroken. Something has to be done, so he is not going to completely wipe out the earth, but he is going to launder it—he is going to cleanse it—he is going to wash it with a flood, preserving in the ark all the creatures he had made in the first place, so that they can repopulate when it is over. So, that is the setup, but how the story goes and how it unfolds, we will take a look at that in just a moment.

Segment 2

DAVE BAST

You are listening to *Groundwork*, where we are digging into scripture to lay the foundation for our lives. I am Dave Bast.

SCOTT HOEZEE

And I am Scott Hoezee; and we are in this program...program four in a five-part series on the earliest stories in Genesis 1 through 11...and today we are in Genesis 6 through 9, which, as many people know, is the well-known story of the biblical flood; Noah's ark, as it is commonly known; and Dave, we just looked at Genesis 6; first noting that God is not angry over sin, but deeply grieved and heartbroken; and so he is going to cleanse the earth with a flood, but he is not going to wipe everybody out; he is going to save a remnant: Noah, his family, and every kind of bird, animal, and creeping thing.

DAVE BAST

Right; so, Noah is the faithful one—the one who is righteous because of his trust in God and his obedience to God. He begins to build the ark, and Genesis 7 has all the details about that. It is basically a big, oblong box. It is sort of coffin shaped, and it is tall and wide and extra long, and it has all of these compartments. We won't get into all the details or read that story, but Noah does it; and the day comes when God says: Okay, get those animals...gather them and start loading up, because it is coming.

SCOTT HOEZEE

And it does eventually; and it rains the proverbial forty days and forty nights; and of course, in the world view of scripture, the cosmology, if you will, the view of the universe that was common in the ancient Near East, and very much reflected in the way the biblical author of Genesis wrote is that the earth is sort of...it is flat...

DAVE BAST

Right.

SCOTT HOEZEE

It has a dome over it. I always picture it kind of like a snow globe. You know, the firmament is over...except that for this snow globe the water is on the outside, not the inside; and so, the earth is floating with waters above the earth and under the earth, we are told; and so, when the flood comes, God pokes holes in the firmament above so it rains; but the text also says the waters came up because God pokes holes in the bottom of the earth so that the waters under the earth...

DAVE BAST

It bubbles up, yes.

SCOTT HOEZEE

They bubble up, so we get it from the top and the bottom...

DAVE BAST

Kind of like water coming out a sewer when it overflows in a huge storm. You know, I just want to say a word here about that worldview of the biblical writer, and the biblical audience, for that matter, because I think this is an important point that people perhaps should grasp. This is how God chose to reveal his truth to people...to the people of Israel. He did not override their thoughts about the world, which they derived from their own culture and society around them. So, you know, we know that the earth is not a disk floating on a subterranean ocean, and that there is not a solid sky with water above it, but that is the way it looked, you know...

SCOTT HOEZEE

Sure.

DAVE BAST

Because when it rains water falls down, you know, and there are springs where water bubbles up. So, God chose to reveal his truth in terms that they could grasp.

SCOTT HOEZEE

Right.

DAVE BAST

The Bible is not an esoteric book. It does not have secret scientific knowledge—modern science hidden in it. So, this is the story.

SCOTT HOEZEE

Yes; and, as we often teach our students in seminary, too, that we call the Bible infallible, and by that we mean that the Bible is totally trustworthy in what it intends to teach us. It is not trying to teach us what the universe is really like...

DAVE BAST

Right; exactly.

SCOTT HOEZEE

That there is a solar system... So, the biblical author is going to reflect a common view of the world without actively teaching it. So, we do not have to accept their views on agriculture or reproduction or cosmology, because they were not teaching us that. They are teaching us important things about God; and so, also, you know, are we really to think now in our modern day that the flood was from the North Pole to the South Pole,

from Canada to China. If you could have been out in space on the moon, would the whole earth have just been one big blue dot? Probably we are not supposed to think that, but the world that they knew...the whole world had been flooded; and as our friend, John Hilber, who was on two of our programs in this series, pointed out to us, Dave, in an off-air conversation, there is some sense that this is the language of hyperbole—of exaggeration...

DAVE BAST

Right.

SCOTT HOEZEE

To show that for all intents and purposes, this was total. God is totally doing this.

DAVE BAST

Because he is totally against sin...

SCOTT HOEZEE

Right.

DAVE BAST

That is the point that is being made. This is the reaction that human wickedness provokes; and it is a drastic...it is a devastating reaction, and it is a preview, really, of the final judgment. II Peter makes the point: God is not going to destroy the world in a flood again, but he is going to sort of unmake it and remake it when he finally and forever deals with sin. So, that is what we read; that is the story of the flood. We take it for what it is, then we come to the aftermath of the flood when finally, after days and days and days, months and months...beautiful symbol...Noah sends out a bird—he sends out a dove—and it eventually comes back with an olive leaf in its beak, still today a symbol of peace—the olive branch—the dove; and so, he knows it is okay, and God says: Okay, you can get out now. The earth dries.

SCOTT HOEZEE

And then in Genesis 8, after they have left the ark, Noah sacrifices to God; and so we read this in Genesis 8:20: Then Noah built an altar to the Lord and took of every clean animal and of every clean bird and offered burnt offerings on the altar; ²¹and when the Lord smelled the pleasing odor, the Lord said in his heart, “I will never again curse the ground because of humankind; for the inclination of the human heart is evil from youth; nor will I ever again destroy every living creature as I have done.”

So, that is what the Lord says to himself...

DAVE BAST

Right.

SCOTT HOEZEE

When he sees this sacrifice from Noah, but what is interesting, Dave, is that God’s reason never to do this again turns out to be identical to the reason in Genesis 6 for why he did it in the first place.

DAVE BAST

Yes; listen to this verse. I will read it again. We read it earlier, but this is Genesis 6:5:

The Lord saw that the wickedness of humankind was great in the earth and that every inclination of the thoughts of their hearts was only evil continually.

That is sort of piling on: Every...only...every human being...every thought...only evil continually; but it is exactly the same phrase that he uses in Genesis 8 for why he won’t...

SCOTT HOEZEE

Exactly; in fact, in the Hebrew it is really almost identical wording. So, how can God use the same reason, namely people are just evil from youth on, to send a flood and then to promise never to send a flood; what is

going on here? I think what we are supposed to pick up here is that God's first response to humanity's being sinful from youth on is grief, and grief leads him to send the flood. It turns out it did not really change anything about the human heart, but now God has changed, and now he says: From here on it is not going to be grief that is going to guide me, it is going to be grace. So, the flood is a change from grief to grace...and again, if you go to seminary you are told God cannot change. He is the same yesterday, today and tomorrow...there is divine immutability—a big term—God cannot change. The Bible does not worry about that. It says, no, he did change. God was grieved and so he sent a flood, but then he realizes, that didn't do it; I am going to have to find a different way to save these people, so now I am going to switch to grace, and grace is going to lead us all the way to a cross eventually.

DAVE BAST

Yes; that also explains, I think, what we also read in the aftermath of this story, and it is the part that is usually left out, you know, when things are simplified for kids. We have often mentioned the Sunday school version. So, the Sunday school version: Noah builds the ark; you know, the flood comes; the waters go away; out comes the rainbow. We will say more about that in a minute, but in the Bible the aftermath is Noah gets drunk...

SCOTT HOEZEE

Right.

DAVE BAST

And his sons come in and something weird happens...something bad...and there is all sorts of further cursing and things fall apart again. So, you know, the flood really didn't solve anything...

SCOTT HOEZEE

Right.

DAVE BAST

Because human nature has not been fully and finally changed; so the message is: God is now going to approach this with grace. He is not going to make light of sin...

SCOTT HOEZEE

No.

DAVE BAST

He will deal with it ultimately, but it is going to be through grace that he primarily relates to people.

SCOTT HOEZEE

And that is, I think, a key, key teaching of this story. You know, almost all ancient cultures, Dave, in the ancient Near East had their own version of the flood story—a deluge story; but what makes the Hebrew story...what we believe the true story...different from Babylonian or Egyptian or any other flood stories out there is just that; that God remains God, and he is not going to be an angry God, but a gracious God from here on out. So, that is sort of what happens in this story, but there are a few other things that we want to look at as we close the program, and we will do that in a moment.

Segment 3

DAVE BAST

I am Dave Bast, along with Scott Hoezee, and you are listening to *Groundwork*, where today we are looking at the flood story; and we just now, a few moments ago, referred to the rainbow. So, let's read that part of the story from Genesis 9:

⁸Then God said to Noah and to his sons with him, ⁹“As for me, I am establishing my covenant with you and your descendents after you, ¹⁰and with every living creature that is with you: the birds, the domestic animals, and every animal of the earth with you, as many as came out of the ark. ¹¹I establish my covenant with you

that never again shall all flesh be cut off by the waters of a flood; and never again shall there be a flood to destroy the earth. ¹³I have set my bow in the clouds, and it shall be a sign of the covenant between me and the earth. ¹⁴When I bring clouds over the earth and the bow is seen in the clouds, I will remember my covenant.”

SCOTT HOEZEE

So, the very famous image there of the rainbow. We won't bother debating whether God needs a rainbow to jog his memory...probably not. It is also a sign for us; some, though, have suggested that the bow part of this is like an archer's bow—like a bow and arrow, and that this is like God saying; I am hanging up my weapon. I am not going to shoot arrows anymore; I am not going to send another flood. That is what we see, the change of God from grief, which led to a flood, to grace, which is going to lead to a new salvation at the cross...

DAVE BAST

Right.

SCOTT HOEZEE

The human heart, as you said, with Noah getting drunk and some bad stuff happens right away after the flood, the human heart did not change through the flood, so God is going to find a way to change the human heart, and it will be the way of grace that brings us straight to the cross; but I think what we want to think about just as we close out this program, Dave, this is a terrible story, right? You know, in the movie *Titanic*, years ago, after the great luxury liner sinks, there are like 1,500 people who end up in the icy waters of the North Atlantic. They are all bobbing around because they are wearing lifejackets—life vests—and the people in the lifeboats...who got into the lifeboats...they hear the screams, but as the minutes tick by as these people succumb to hypothermia in these icy waters, the crying gets quieter and quieter and quieter until finally it is still because they are all dead. Noah and his family must have heard those screams from people outside. It is horrible story, but it tells us that sin is serious.

DAVE BAST

Yes; and certainly God takes it seriously. I don't think we should try to soften the terrible nature of the story of the flood; just imagine; and even the animals are caught up. You know, a lot of people today are paying more attention to animal pain...

SCOTT HOEZEE

Right.

DAVE BAST

And I think rightly so. Animals are part of the creation, too. Their needless suffering is a problem, I think, for sensitive people; but, you know, the Apostle Paul says in Romans 8 that the whole creation is groaning under the effects of sin. So, the earth itself, and plants and animals, are also caught up in what human rebellion against God has wrought, and the devastation that has spread. So, yes, God is not going to wink at sin. God must take it seriously or he is not just at all...

SCOTT HOEZEE

Right.

DAVE BAST

And so, that is one of the messages...

SCOTT HOEZEE

Right.

DAVE BAST

Don't make light of it. Don't say: Oh, God can just slough it off. He can laugh it off; he's God, right? No, he cannot.

SCOTT HOEZEE

And I think the thing to remember, too, which sometimes we forget because we are so used to seeing the image of the cross in our churches or our necklaces and earrings and bulletin covers...the cross...that story is horrible, too. What happened to the Son of God...the Son of God came down to this earth and we killed him; and that is as horrible a story as the flood story, when you think about it; but that, too, was the price of sin. That is how seriously God takes sin; but again, he put his bow in the sky in Genesis 9 and said: I will take care of this myself from here on out, and that again, does lead us to Jesus, who took our sin...all of that horribleness...took it on himself...went to hell for us in our place, and so has brought a new day. So, now that we know that God is a God of grace and mercy, and that he has provided a way of salvation for us.

DAVE BAST

That is really the message of the rainbow, isn't it? It is not just, oh, the sun comes out from behind the clouds and somehow the prismatic effects of water vapor in the air creates this wonderful swath of color; but it is a token of grace—it is a message from God that he will not judge forever; he will deal with sin himself—he will take it upon himself, and he will offer forgiveness and mercy to us.

SCOTT HOEZEE

It reminds me of a story that retired Princeton Seminary professor, Daniel Migliore, told once. He taught at Princeton Seminary, but he helped out with a daily vacation Bible school in Trenton, New Jersey. It was for inner city kids in a very burnt out part of the city. So, one day in vacation Bible school the story of Noah and the ark was the story, and so after the story, Migliore kind of asked that Sunday school question: Well, boys and girls; where do you see rainbows? And the kids said: In the streets! He thought they misunderstood, so he said: No, no, no. Where do you see rainbows? And they said: In the streets! And as he talked to the children, he realized the truth. They lived in this high-rise area. They did not see the sky. They had never seen a rainbow in the sky; they had only seen rainbows in greasy street puddles where oil dripping from a car creates that rainbow oil slick, and those were the only rainbows they saw; and at first that made Migliore sad, that they never saw a real rainbow in the sky; and then he thought: But wait; where do these children need to see the sign of God's hope, if not in the burnt-over reality of their own lives; and Migliore said: That is true for all of us. God comes to us in our suffering now; because of Jesus, he comes to us where we are, and that is exactly where he gives us signs of hope.

DAVE BAST

Where do you need grace? Well, you need it in the pain and trauma that so often comes. You need it in the midst of broken relationships. You need it when it seems like you have reached the end; and God speaks his Word of grace and mercy. He shows us signs, maybe even through another person—maybe especially through another person—who comes with the encouragement that the Gospel gives. So, thanks be to God that he has turned, in fact, from grief to grace for each of us.

SCOTT HOEZEE

Well, thanks for listening and digging deeply into scripture with *Groundwork*. We are your hosts, Scott Hoezee and Dave Bast. We hope you will join us again next time as we look at the Tower of Babel, and God's purpose and plan for the nations of the world.

Connect with us on our website, groundworkonline.com; share what *Groundwork* means to you, and give us some suggestions for future *Groundwork* programs.

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