

Then God said to Noah and to his sons with him, 9 "As for me, I am establishing my covenant with you and your descendants after you, 10 and 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. 11 I 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."

12 God said, "This is the sign of the covenant that I make between me and you and every living creature that is with you, for all future generations: 13 I have set my bow in the clouds, and it shall be a sign of the covenant between me and the earth. 14 When I bring clouds over the earth and the bow is seen in the clouds, 15 I will remember my covenant that is between me and you and every living creature of all flesh; and the waters shall never again become a flood to destroy all flesh. 16 When the bow is in the clouds, I will see it and remember the everlasting covenant between God and every living creature of all flesh that is on the earth." 17 God said to Noah, "This is the sign of the covenant that I have established between me and all flesh that is on the earth." This is the word of the Lord.

Psalm 25 (Responsively):

To you, O Lord, I lift up my soul.

O my God, in you I trust;

Make me to know your ways, O Lord; teach me your paths.

Lead me in your truth, and teach me, for you are the God of my salvation; for you I wait all day long.

Be mindful of your mercy, O LORD, and of your steadfast love, for they have been from of old.

Do not remember the sins of my youth or my transgressions; according to your steadfast love remember me, for your goodness' sake, O LORD!

Good and upright is the LORD; therefore he instructs sinners in the way.

He leads the humble in what is right, and teaches the humble his way.

All the paths of the Lord are steadfast love and faithfulness, for those who keep his covenant and his decrees.

“Committed to the Flesh”

Even though there is a great deal of biblical illiteracy out there, most people have heard the Bible story of Noah’s ark, if not in Sunday School, they’ve picked it up since they were children from the decorations of their bedrooms, or the toys and clothing marketed to them or the preschool songs they’ve learned to sing. Then there’s every so often a report of some archeologist who thinks they’ve found a piece of the ark, and of course, there’s those corny jokes that bring the story to light, jokes musing how the unicorns must have missed the boat, how the ark survived the termites or why Noah didn’t take the chance when he had it to get rid of cockroaches. Yes, most people have heard the story of Noah’s ark.

But, as you might imagine, the scriptural story of Noah is actually very different than what most know. In fact, the flood account is actually not a children’s story...it’s pretty terrifying. It was, in fact, as you might already know, likely claimed as Jewish scripture from a common religious tradition of flood accounts written in the Ancient Near East literature. It was first written down when God’s people were in a situation of tremendous loss, stress, and helplessness, probably at the time of the exile 6th c BCE. The Babylonians had defeated their army, leveled Jerusalem, and carried them off into captivity, into exile, a time when everything that was known, stable, and reliable was no more. The people felt abandoned, alone, without hope. They must have felt like they were experiencing a kind of chaos, just like the chaos of a Noah’s mighty flood sweeping away everything that was purposeful and beautiful and precious.¹ However, as the Genesis story unfolded for them, it gave them something more than something to identify with. It gave them encouragement, comfort and hope. It ultimately affirmed for them the character of their living, sovereign God.

You recall....the story begins with the people who populated the earth being wicked, murderous, and violent; they had no regard for the value of life, no regard for goodness or order at all. Their crimes could be traced back to the disobedience of Adam and Eve, to the murder of Abel by Cain, and the perversion of Cain’s descendent, Lamech and Lamech’s people. Creation

¹ John Buchanan. Sermon: “Promise”. <https://www.fourthchurch.org/sermons/2005/062605.html> (accessed 2-16-2024).

had turned its back on its Creator. As Walter Brueggemann says, “*Creation had exchanged the truth about God for a lie, worshiping and serving the creature rather than the Creator*”.² And the Creator God, as all ANE deities are, was angry, and of the mind to smash everything to bits...in this case, to flood the whole project. “Divine justice demanding punishment”. It is the oldest idea people had of God: an angry judge, punishing recalcitrant and disobedient people. It is the oldest presentation of how ancient people saw religion.

However, then the Genesis story departs from the ANE type narrative. The authors’ perspective of their, our, God takes a turn from that of the pagans. God was shown to detest the sin of the people not because God is an angry tyrant but because the people were behaving contrary to all that God is, wholly JUST and pure, righteous beyond compare. The people were not behaving as God created them and not in the way God deeply desired for them. Additionally, God was shown to not be distant and immovable but vulnerable and free, free to enter into his Creation, into its pain and brokenness as well as its joys and successes. Consequently, the God of Israel could be compassionate and have a change of heart, even if a broken heart.³ The God of Israel could choose to exercise restraint and divine mercy and could rescue that which should otherwise be condemned.⁴ In the Biblical story then we see that God chose to NOT destroy the entire world but to spare righteous Noah, his family and two of every species of creature.

This revelation of God’s character was affirmed further when God made a promise, a covenant, that never again will God destroy Creation. As a sign of the covenant, God set a rainbow, a bow pointing away from the earth, in the clouds—not to jog Noah’s memory, but God’s. Note that it was a covenant without strings attached. It was not a conditional “if/then” promise. There was no expectation that Creation would change. And sure enough, it was not long before Jacob was stealing Esau’s birthright, Aaron was dancing around a golden calf, and David was figuring out how to kill Bathsheba’s husband.”⁵ In fact, it was not too long before

² Walter Brueggemann. “*Genesis*.” In: Interpretation. A Bible Commentary. James Mays, Patrick Miller, eds (Atlanta: JKP; 1982), 76.

³ Walter Brueggemann, pg 81

⁴ Walter Brueggemann, pg 78.

⁵ Barbara Brown Taylor. “*Refreshing God’s Memory*” In: Gospel Medicine (Boston: Cowley Pub; 1995), 32.

people were irrevocably polluting the planet, developing nuclear bombs, committing horrific cyber-crimes, pulling off ponzi schemes, and shooting children in churches and celebratory parades. *“Evil continues. Bad things happen, but since Genesis 9, we know that none of them is rooted in our God’s ill will toward us”*.⁶ With this covenant God has pledged that God will stay with us, will endure our burdens, and sustain the world despite our sorry state. Barbara Brown Taylor, says it this way, *“From this point on, God is bringing Godself to the Creation in peace, promising himself to it although he knows how it will wound him. God chooses to ally himself with his cantankerous creation whatever the cost. If there is to be pain in the world, our God will share it. God’s promise to the world is life, not death.”*⁷

So, friends, the Noah story is much more than the story we learned as children, or that we might teach our own. It is the story which introduces the truth which is then threaded throughout all of Scripture, (repeat) and is at the heart of the Gospel, the truth about our God, who, at cost to Godself, makes.... A COMMITMENT TO THE FLESH. (repeat) Ex 6:6-7 *“I will deliver you from your bondage...I will redeem you with an outstretched arm...I will take you for my people and I will be your God.* Is 43:1-2 *“I have redeemed you....When you pass through the rivers, they shall not overwhelm you.”* Jr 31:33 *I will put my law within them, and I will write it on their hearts...I will forgive their iniquity, and remember their sin no more,”* and Jn 1:14 *“And the Word became flesh and lived among us, and we have seen his glory.”*

Right. Sooooo, how does this translate for us in our lives? (repeat)

Well, does it not mean that we can get up each day to face the world differently? For no matter what bad happens, and it happens, we can count on God to help us through. For instance, when we sin and fall short of what we were created to be, and we do, we can still go on without the weight of guilt or shame paralyzing us. We can walk forward forgiven, repentant, not fearing eternal punishment.for God wants for us life not death. God is committed to this. God has been, from the beginning, committed to the flesh, and the fact frees

⁶ Barbara Brown Taylor 32

⁷ Barbara Brow Taylor, 32.

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us to then do more with our lives than just protect them. We are free to offer them.⁸ We are free to offer our lives for the world as well. We are free to be the people God created us to be. Yes, brothers and sisters, the Noehtic covenant means this for us. God will never abandon creation. God will never abandon us. So, the next time it rains, and the sun sneaks up behind the rain droplets, search the sky for God's rainbow and remember, remember that we are children of the God who is committed to the flesh.

To God be the glory. Amen.

⁸ Buchanan.