

6. The Earth after the Flood

Biblical material: Genesis 9-11.

Quotes:

- They say they want the kingdom, but they don't want God in it. *U2, 'The Wanderer'*
- Such is the human race, often it seems a pity that Noah... didn't miss the boat. *Mark Twain*
- As to the project of building a tower whose top should reach to heaven, there never could be a people so foolish as to have such a notion; but to represent the Almighty as jealous of the attempt, as the writer of the story has done, is adding profanation to folly... This is representing the Almighty as jealous of their getting into heaven. *Thomas Paine*
- Let us read the Bible without the ill-fitting colored spectacles of theology, just as we read other books, using our own judgment and reason, listening to the voice within, not to the noisy babel without. Most of us possess discriminating reasoning powers. Can we use them or must we be fed by others like babes? *Luther Burbank*

Questions

What is the main characteristic of humanity after the Flood? What lesson did the on-looking universe learn from the Flood and its aftermath? What would you have done if you were in God's place? If sin was so sinful then, why is it taking so long? Is God's character taking many hits? Why does the lifespan of human beings decline so sharply?

Discussion

Instead of responding to the Flood with a recognition of why God had to act in this way, the descendants of Noah chose rather to blame God for what happened. Their desire to build the Tower of Babel is clearly motivated by a human-based desire to counter another divine intervention. This perversity of rebellion well illustrates the continuing problem of the "sin infection," which the Flood did little to clear. Once again God is demonstrating what effects sin has, and the difficulties in resolving the problems raised. Even when God takes drastic action to try and preserve what little is left, he is cursed for so doing, or blamed for being a hostile Being.

The Tower of Babel is illustrative of a defiant and insolent attitude to God. The reaction is not one of repentance but of even greater opposition to the God who wants to help and save. Instead they become even more determined to "reach heaven" through their own efforts by trying to build a tower that will reach to the heights. God's reaction might appear to indicate that he believed this might be possible, but as always God is using human ideas and expressing himself in human terms. The confusion of human language is not really predicated on a threat to God or a possibility of "breaching heaven's battlements," but rather a way of preventing such concerted opposition. By fragmenting human language, God seeks to help individuals and smaller groups relate to him without concerted peer pressure.

Instead of believing the covenant God made with Noah and his descendants (the rainbow of promise), they rejected the divine assurance and preferred to think that God would repeat the act. God's covenant was despised, as was God. The on-looking universe could once again see the perversity of sin, its entrenched position, and the challenge to the government of God. Yet God

was willing to do all this as part of the demonstration, willing to deal with all the misrepresentation of his character.

The destruction of most of humanity by the Flood may have stemmed the rapid degradation of humanity, but it did not prove an effective solution to sin. The angels and other beings who saw the “Flood judgment,” and who may even have encouraged it, saw that such an action did not take care of the fundamental problem of sinful attitudes.

Comment

“They say they want the kingdom, but they don’t want God in it.” *U2, ‘One’* How many people think like that? They long for a better world, yet exclude religious convictions. They say they want good government and a crime-free society, but they dismiss the God of morals and righteousness. They look for an eternity of existence, but refuse to come to the only one who can make life immortal. How is it possible to look for the kingdom of God, yet reject God?

The challenge to the Babel-makers of today is that all the best plans for a new Golden Age on earth is that it comes to grief on the rocks of human selfishness. Though it is hard for some to accept, human nature leads to selfishness and exploitation, to personal advancement and the corruption of power. Despite the best of human attempts, we always fail to build the kingdom by ourselves. Unless God is there, human plans are in vain.

That should not lead us to try and set up God’s kingdom here on earth. Man-made theocracies are even worse, for they are based on religious coercion. Those who would bring in some kind of “Christian America” by compulsion are just as misguided as the builders of the Tower of Babel, for it flies in the face of what God has said. His promise is not to bring about a “divine revolution” that will usher in some improved version of human government, but a total transformation—new heavens and a new earth—where righteousness dwells. That is God’s covenant, and those who fight such a covenant are as rebellious as the builders of Babel.

Ellen White Comment

The Babel builders had indulged the spirit of murmuring against God. Instead of gratefully remembering His mercy to Adam and His gracious covenant with Noah, they had complained of His severity in expelling the first pair from Eden and destroying the world by a flood. But while they murmured against God as arbitrary and severe, they were accepting the rule of the cruelest of tyrants. Satan was seeking to bring contempt upon the sacrificial offerings that prefigured the death of Christ; and as the minds of the people were darkened by idolatry, he led them to counterfeit these offerings and sacrifice their own children upon the altars of their gods. As men turned away from God, the divine attributes—justice, purity, and love—were supplanted by oppression, violence, and brutality. {PP 120}

Some of the descendants of Noah soon began to apostatize. A portion followed the example of Noah, and obeyed God’s commandments; others were unbelieving and rebellious, and even these did not believe alike in regard to the flood. Some disbelieved in the existence of God, and in their own minds accounted for the flood from natural causes. Others believed that God existed, and that he destroyed the antediluvian race by a flood; and their feelings, like Cain, rose in rebellion against God, because he destroyed the people from the earth, and cursed the earth the third time by a flood. {1SP 91}

Satan is exercising his power over the human race. He accused God and Christ, misrepresenting the Father, and deceiving men in regard to the Prince of the hosts of heaven.

More and more he was obscuring the knowledge of the only true God, taking possession of the minds of men, and afflicting their bodies. {YI, October 10, 1895 par. 3}

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