

BaptistWay Bible Series for April 25: Noah: Finding grace

April 13, 2010

Why would God destroy creation?

It is at best cheap and naïve—and at worst dishonest—to try to avoid the initial question raised by this story: Why would a loving God choose to destroy a creation he had called “good”? A creation that included human beings made in God’s image. To the cynic and the postmodern relativist, the easy answer is God either must have been shocked by their behavior into a great sense of regret and revenge, or God must not have loved the people all that much in the first place. The prior reaction denies the omniscience of God; the latter denies agape. There must be another explanation.

Verse 5 offers the best clue. Notice the superlative description of the evil of humankind, repeated three times as Hebrew writers did (and do) to demonstrate the highest level of emphasis. Every inclination of human thought was only evil all the time. This was not a world where men and women struggled with sin and tried but failed to please God. Instead, these were creatures so bereft of goodness and obedience as to have become objects of God’s wrath.

It is not popular to view God’s wrath as a side of God’s love, but Scripture repeatedly talks about it. Wrath is not that God does not love sinners or that he would simply prefer that we not sin; he literally cannot coexist with it.

God is holy (again repeated three times in Isaiah 6, where God is “holy holy holy”), and holiness has, as its base, the concept of purity. God’s purity by definition cannot reside with those whose every inclination is only evil all

the time. Because “wrath” in human terms implies an emotion of anger, we lose sight of the fact that the wrath of God is not human but divine; God’s wrath defines the state of separation from God of those who have abandoned holiness. The wrath of God is the purest form of love, for it models what God’s creatures should be, utterly repulsed by sin.

Verse 6 tells us, depending on the translation, that God “repented” or “was grieved” or “regretted” the creation of humans. Just as some biblical writers anthropomorphically describe God with human physical characteristics like fingers and eyes, other writers anthropopathically describe God with human feelings.

We cannot let this literary device fool us into lowering our understanding of God—God did not wake up one day in surprise and decide that creation of humans was a mistake. No; instead, humanity’s perversion and evil reached a point where God literally could not abide it anymore.

Grace comes in the midst of a flood

Grace is planned before the first raindrop falls, when God talks to Noah, giving him precise instruction as to how to avoid the coming catastrophe.

The provision of grace to Noah can be broken down into recognizable acts of God.

- *Noah is known.* God sees Noah, recognizes Noah’s faithfulness and makes gracious provision for him. Our love for God and our lives of blamelessness amidst the hordes are not unnoticed by God.
- *A way of escape is planned.* Just as God’s command to Adam and Eve in the garden may not have made immediate sense to them, the word to Noah—build something called an ark in the middle of the desert that had never known rain, much less a flood—could not have been reasonable in any human sense to Noah; still, it was the word of the Lord, and Noah was

a blameless and upright man.

- *The future of all of mankind was secured.* You and I would not be here now but for the gracious provision for those in the ark. What may have seemed, in the short term, to be a destruction of humanity was in fact a manner of provision for millions of future generations through the life and work of one blameless man.

- *The act of grace is secured by God's promise.* The rainbow may be explained by a physicist with a prism, but its meaning as a sign of God's gracious covenant is clear to all who know God.

God sends arks of grace

Sinful society has so separated itself from God that it is on the road to destruction, yet God sends grace. Just as naked Adam and Eve were given clothes, just as Cain received his mark, now Noah and his family receive building instructions for an ark. Following those instructions faithfully, Noah finds himself with the only salvation available.

Floods come to us for all sorts of reasons.

- *We cause them.* Often, every intention of our heart is only evil all the time. We get what we deserve. Our sins find us out.

- *Others cause them.* Sometimes, we have been blameless, but the sins of others catch us up in the storm, bringing us disease, destruction, divorce, disappointment or disloyalty. Wars rage over issues that have nothing to do with us, yet we are caught in the crossfire.

- *Nature causes them.* We may never understand this side of heaven why the tornado or the hurricane comes, why the cancer strikes the healthy teenager, why psychosis attacks the brilliant mind.

- *God allows them.* For some storms, there is no explanation for us. We

can struggle with the questions of why an omniscient, omnipotent, all-loving God can allow them; whether we find an answer or not, God allows the storms.

The lesson is that arks—just like the storms—come to us in all sorts of ways.

- *Sometimes, we build them.* We hear a word from God, and we understand his instructions. Faithfully following, we find ourselves positioned to ride the storm out, rising above the waves.
- *Others build them for us.* God works through the church, through our friends, through the prayers of those whom we have never met. Through driving rains, we see the hands of rescuers that reach out to us, lifting us out of the rushing tide.
- *Though we often miss them, some arks come to us naturally.* The hands of the doctor, the calm of the southern wind, the mutation that fights the disease—God’s grace often is extended to us in ways that have no explanation beyond nature taking its course. It was, after all, a great rush of wind that parted the Red Sea.
- *God simply intervenes.* The word “miracle” has gone out of style for some, but we cannot ignore the arks that come without explanation other than the grace of God.

To be sure, grace does not come to all in the same way. Some are saved from the storm; others are protected through the storm; still others are taken by the storm, only to receive the ultimate healing of the grace of God through eternity.