

Book of Genesis – Part III

I. Genesis 4:1-6:10 – “Chaos, Judgment and Mercy”

Once Adam and Eve are expelled from Eden, the events of human history become dominated by sin. Yet in all these tragic events, God’s mercy shines through, as it did after the fall with God’s promise of the woman’s offspring (3:15) and God’s clothing Adam and Eve (3:21). Nonetheless, as human history continues, we encounter the first murder, cosmic rebellion including both celestial beings (“sons of God,” 6:4) and humans, and a degenerating into complete evil (6:5). We reach the depths of a situation where God sees the wickedness of humans everywhere and reaches the point where he decides to destroy not only the humans he had made in his own image (1:27), but the animal kingdom as well (6:7). In the midst of this chaos, we encounter a remarkable exception, Noah, who is “a righteous man, blameless in his generation” (6:9).

1. Murder in the Family - 4:1-17

- a. We read of the birth of Cain and Abel. Abel is a shepherd and Cain is essentially a farmer. Both bring offerings to the Lord. We read that the Lord “had regard for Abel and his offering, but for Cain and his offering he had no regard.” No explanation is given about the respective offerings, why one was accepted and the other not. This is perhaps our first true encounter with the sovereignty of God in Scripture. In a famous text (Ex. 33:19), God says he will be gracious to whom he will be gracious and merciful to whom he will be merciful. Our initial reaction is to think that this is unfair. Yet God is under no obligation to us. He is free to choose as he desires.
- b. Understandably, Cain takes offense and becomes angry. God makes it clear to Cain that he personally is not being rejected (v. 6). This really is a test for him. God tells him that sin is lurking at his door. He must resist it (the root word for “lurking” here can also be taken as a reference to a demon). The important thing to note here is that Cain has committed no offense. God simply chose not to accept his sacrifice. Cain has to resist the temptation to give in to his anger and resentment.
- c. Cain however does give in to his anger. He takes Abel out into the field and there kills him. In an echo of God’s question to Adam after the fall, he asks Abel, “Where is your brother?” (v. 9; cf. 3:9). Cain answers with a direct lie followed by an evasive comment. He denies knowing where Abel is and then adds, “am I my brother’s keeper?” (v. 9). Of course, the answer is “Yes,” we are all each other’s brother and sister (Matt. 25:31-46).
- d. God can neither be deceived nor evaded (Gal. 6:7). The phrase that Abel’s blood is crying out to God from the ground (v. 11) supports the idea that God has built a moral order into his creation.

- e. Cain is sent out to be a “fugitive and a wanderer on the earth” (v. 14). As the ground resisted his father, Adam, it will resist Cain even more (.4:12; 3:17). The symbolic character of the story is underscored by the fact that Adam and his family aren’t the only people on the earth. Cain is afraid that someone might kill him (vv. 14-15). We then read of Cain’s wife. One possibility here that fits in with our tradition of Reformed Theology is that God chose Adam and Eve as representatives of the human race. They were apparently not the only humans God had created.

2. A Chronicle of Human History – 4:18-5:32

- a. This next section, which has challenged interpreters, appears to be a history of the development and decline of human history following the emergence of sin.
- b. We learn of the following:
 - i. Jabal who was the ancestor of those who live in tents and have livestock (5:20). This is important because it describes the kind of life that will later be lived by Abraham.
 - ii. His brother, Jubal, introduces music and musical instruments into history (4:21).
 - iii. Tubal-cain develops tools (4:22)
 - iv. The reference to the speech of Lamech (4:19, 23-24) shows that the violence introduced by Cain continues to affect humanity.
 - v. The birth of Seth, the third son of Adam and Eve (4:25).
- c. The creation of human beings is again referred to (5:1-2). The story of the birth of Seth is repeated suggesting that this is an additional account. The main point of this section seems to be the longevity of humans before the flood. The point of this may be that the growing reality of sin shortens the lives of human beings.
 - i. We learn of Enoch “who walked with God” (5:24).
 - ii. Enoch gives birth to Methuselah who becomes the oldest person in history (he lives for 969 years! – 5:27).
 - iii. Methuselah gives birth to Lamech (5:25), who in turn gives birth to the next major figure in Genesis, Noah (5:28-29).
 - iv. Noah will be the first example of a redeemer figure. He will bring “relief from our work and from the toil of our hands” (5:29). This is the first stage of the fulfillment of the prophecy of a savior coming from the “offspring” of the woman (3:15). **This is the beginning of the unfolding of God’s plan of salvation.**

3. The Return to Chaos – 6:1-10

- a. Remember our suggested thesis that the book of Genesis was composed during the Babylonian Captivity (586-538 BC)? I also suggested that these stories could well have been told to Hebrew children to give a very different view of the world than the one they

found in Babylon. As these various figures and accounts are being told, we can imagine a child asking, "But if the world was created by the one God of Abraham, Isaac and Jacob, where did the Babylonian heroes like Marduk and Gilgamesh come from?" Here is the answer.

- b. There were celestial beings, obviously created by God, who nonetheless had some human characteristics ("sons of God," 6:2; cf. Job 1:6; 2:1; Ps. 82:6-7). These "sons of God" went after human daughters. The result were giants (Nephilim, 6:4; Num. 13:33; Deut. 2:10-11) and "the heroes that were of old, warriors of renown." This then was the origin of the figures in the Babylonian myths.
- c. However, instead of these "heroes" being positive figures, they quickly are seen as examples of the great wickedness of humankind on the earth (6:5). The great statues in Babylon (Dan. 3:1) then represented beings who were opposed to the true God.
- d. This is a devastating indictment. God sees that "every inclination of the thoughts of their hearts was only evil continually" (6:5; Ps. 14:3; Jer. 17:9; Rom. 3:23).
- e. The wickedness of the earth is so great that God plans to destroy all living beings, humans as well as animals.
- f. There is one critical example, Noah, who has "found favor in the sight of the Lord." In the midst of spiritual darkness (Eph. 6:12), God provides a redeemer. The story of salvation moves forward.

Questions for Us –

1. Are there times when we, like Cain, are angry with God? How can we recognize sin "lurking" at our door on these occasions?
2. God is prepared to destroy all living beings on earth because every inclination of the thoughts of the human hearts was only evil continually (6:5). What do we make of this statement? Does it seem so strong for us? Do we believe that ancient people were worse than we are?
3. What do you think Genesis means when it says that people like Enoch and Noah "walked with God" (5:24; 6:9)? What does it mean for us to "walk with God" in the midst of the evil that we encounter in the world?

Next Study – Genesis 6:11-9:28 – "Judgment and New Life"