

Genesis 6

We now enter two of the more interesting and yet problematic stories in the book of Genesis. The first story concerns giants and the second a world-wide flood.

The first story is contained in verses 1-4. In these verses we see the people of God doing what they are supposed to be doing, multiplying and filling the earth. At the same time though, we see creation (meaning heaven and earth) continuing to wander far from God. The wandering in this story is that “the sons of God” or “Nephilim” look favorably on human women, have children with them and those children become the ancient heroes and warriors of antiquity. This mixing between heaven and earth is not part of God’s orderly plan for creation, where there is a place for everything and everything has its place. In a sense, even those in heaven are not living as God desires. Though much ink has been used by those claiming to know who these sons of God/Nephilim are, the reality is that we have no idea. This is one of those Biblical stories that borders on legends shrouded in the mists of time. All we can do, as has been said, is to see this story as another reminder that creation is slowly moving away from God.

The second story, begins in verse 5 and continues not only through the rest of this chapter but to the end of chapter 10. This is the story of Noah. In this article and the next four, we will only focus on that part of the story contained within the individual chapters. The Noah story begins with a reflection on humanity; that it was wicked, that evil was at the center of their hearts (vs. 5) and that it was “corrupt” (vs. 11). One thing that we need to note about the Noah story is that it is two different Noah traditions woven together as a single story. This is why there seems to be repetition and some disagreements within the story. We will point out these differences as we proceed. With that being said, both strands of tradition agree that God’s heart was broken by creation’s self-destructive tendencies. God’s response was that God would start all over, hoping for better results the second time.

In the first strand of tradition, God is going to wipe out everything, including the animals, but decides to begin creation again through Noah, who was the one person that seemed to do what God desired of him. He was righteous and blameless. In the second strand, God is in communication with Noah (just as God had been with Adam and Eve in the garden) and lets Noah in on God’s plan for the flood. It is at this point that God instructs Noah to build the ark. God offers verbal blue-prints for Noah to follow and Noah follows them exactly (as would a righteous and blameless man). In addition, Noah is to fill the ark with two kinds of every animal, male and female, along with adequate supplies.

Reflection: Almost every ancient near-eastern civilization has a flood story. And each one uses their telling of the story to make different points about the gods and humanity. Israel’s retelling lets us know some very important things about God.

First, God loves the world. Long before the Gospel of John, the Genesis writers tell us that God’s heart was broken by the evils of humanity. God’s heart could not be broken if God did not love.

Second, God takes sin seriously. Sin, in this case humanity’s evil and destructive deeds, matter to God because they destroy the goodness of creation.

Third, God will act to deal with evil. God’s love for creation does not allow God to walk away from what God has made. God has a plan for creation and come hell or highwater God will win.

Questions:

1. What things do you think we do that break God’s heart?
2. How has God “started over” with you?
3. Where have you seen God dealing with evil?