

The Extraordinary Message of Genesis 4-11

Humans are accountable

Recap

Michael Heiser: the Bible is 'ancient Mediterranean Literature'

Tim Mackie: 'we need to be good listeners, to listen to the biblical authors on their own terms'.

'The Hebrew Bible was not written to us, but has been given for us'

We are reading someone else's mail: a communication between ancient Israelite prophets and the ancient Israelite people,

And this communication comes together in its final form around a crisis period in their history – the Babylonian exile

High context communication takes place between insiders in situations in which the communicator and audience share much in common. In such situations, less accommodation is necessary for effective communication to take place, and therefore much might be left unsaid that an outsider might need in order to fully understand the communication

By contrast, in **low context communication**, high levels of accommodation are necessary as an insider attempts communication with an outsider....

In the Bible, a human communicator is engaged in expressing an accommodating message to **a high context (i.e, ancient Israelite) audience**. So for example, a prophet and his audience share a history, a culture, a language, and the experiences of their contemporaneous lives...

When we read the Bible, we enter the context as low context outsiders who need to use all our inferential tools to discern the nature of the communication that takes place in that ancient setting, as well as discern from that the revelation God has offered through that communication. We have to use research to fill in all the information that would not have been said by the prophet in his high context communication to his audience. This is how we, as modern readers, must interact with an ancient text’.

P.5 Temper Longman III, John Walton, ‘The Lost World of the Flood’.

Western cultural river

rights, freedom, capitalism, democracy,
individualism, globalism, market economy,
scientific naturalism, an expanding universe,
empiricism, and natural laws

Ancient Near Eastern cultural river

community identity, the comprehensive and
ubiquitous control of the gods, the role of
kingship, divination, the centrality of the
temple, the mediatory role of images and the
reality of the spirit world and magic



Cultural rivers

‘In our modern world, the cultural river is easily identified. Among its currents are various fundamentals such as rights, freedom, capitalism, democracy, individualism, globalism, market economy, scientific naturalism, an expanding universe, empiricism, and natural laws, to name just a few... Some may wish to float in these currents, while others may struggle to swim upstream against them, but everyone in our modern world inevitably is located in its waters. Regardless of our diverse ways of thinking, we are all in the cultural river, and its currents are familiar to us. In the ancient world a very different cultural river flowed through all of the diverse cultures: Egyptian, Phoenician, Assyrian – or Israelite. Despite variations between cultures and across the centuries, certain elements remained largely static... In the ancient world we would find currents such as community identity, the comprehensive and ubiquitous control of the gods, the role of kingship, divination, the centrality of the temple, the mediatory role of images and the reality of the spirit world and magic. The Israelites sometimes floated on the currents of that cultural river without resistance... At other times, however, the revelation of God encouraged them to struggle out of the current into the shallows or even to swim furiously upstream. Whatever the extent of the Israelites interactions with the cultural river, it is important to remember that they were situated in the ancient cultural river, not immersed in the currents of our modern cultural river. P. 7, Temple Longman and John Walton, ‘the Lost World of the Flood’

Context: the Great Symbiosis

‘The Great Symbiosis... we learn that the gods created people because they were tired of the work involved to meet their own needs. Gods needed food, clothes, housing, and so on, but they didn’t want to work for it. Once people were created to serve in this way, it becomes necessary for the gods to provide for people... and protect them... The result is codependence...they don’t really like people, they need people... Yahweh in contrast has no needs and actually desires relationship. Living among people was his plan in the beginning, and it was why he created them’. p.65, Temple Longman and John Walton ‘The lost World of the Flood’.

Recap:

GENESIS ONE: the whole cosmos is a temple, a sacred space, God's space, heaven. He creates humans as his images to rule on his behalf on earth

GENESIS TWO: God's space, heaven and human space, earth, are one in the temple, the sacred space of the Garden of Eden

GENESIS THREE: In order to rule as his images on God's behalf, humans need wisdom. Humans are exiled from the garden, because they seek to rule in their own wisdom, thus forfeiting God's presence



Eden, anti-Edens and exile narratives

'Tov' (good) and 'ra' (evil) in God's eyes or 'tov' and 'ra' in human eyes

The whole Hebrew Bible is a reading of the world through God's eyes, reading what is 'tov' and 'ra' according to his wisdom.

This is what true prophecy is: seeing as God's sees, rather than as we see

How do we discern true Eden's from false Eden's: we see whose eyes the author is describing as looking through.

Eden's are marked by fruit trees, rivers, springs, gold and precious jewels and mountains

Isaiah 25.6-9

Isaiah 58.6-11

New Eden Revelation 21.1-4, 22-22.1-5

Superabundance for all

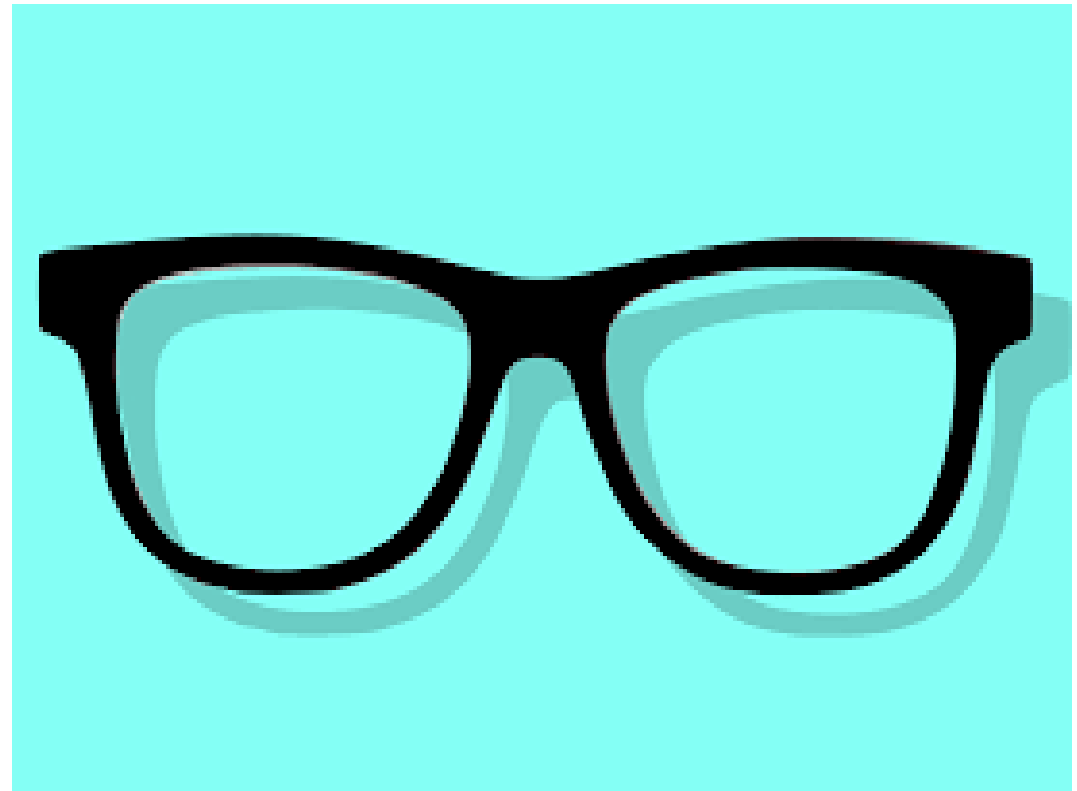
Adam and Eve's fall and exile foreshadow the nation of Israel: the golden calf is their 'fall' narrative, and they wander in the wilderness for 40 years, then continually failing to re-build Eden in the Promised Land, they are finally exiled to Babylon, an anti-Eden whose wealth and grandeur is built through violence, oppression and injustice

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‘The story of the Bible is the reunion of heaven and earth’. Tim Mackie

There is a promise, though, of a seed of the woman who will crush the seed of the snake.

GENESIS FOUR TO ELEVEN:

Two genealogies which trace the 'seed of the woman', the line of Adam to Noah, then Noah to Abraham

Punctuated by narratives of individual and societal 'life' East of Eden, life in exile from God's presence, the consequences of human's ruling in their own wisdom

And the human accountability for these consequences before God.

Two potential stumbling blocks:

The years in the genealogies are in the 100s

biblical genealogies are carefully organised by the authors in order to communicate a meaning, specifically: identity, eg compare Jesus' 2 genealogies

three kings in a Sumerian genealogy (also listing 10 names) are given 75,000 years (see NIV Study Bible footnote)

Hebrew letters are also their numbering system

the length of years slowly reduces

The language around the flood is universal

highly likely there was a highly traumatic but relatively localised flood

biblical authors often use hyperbole as a rhetorical device to communicate their meaning (see Temple Longman and John Walton, *The Lost World of the Flood*); Jesus uses hyperbole in his teaching about sin

‘How does the study of historical background material affect our understanding of the text of Scripture? Do we look for meaning or sense in the text of Scripture itself, or is the text primarily a witness to act of God’s self-revelation in the events recorded by Scripture?’

In 2 Timothy 3.16 Paul writes ‘All Scripture is inspired by God’... we are accustomed to directing our attention towards the second part of Paul’s statement, that Scripture is inspired... however, it is equally appropriate to begin focusing on the first half on the first part of Paul’s statement that ‘all Scripture’ is inspired. In calling Scripture inspired, Paul gives the written text the highest claim to authority. It is specifically ‘Scripture’ that Paul points to as the locus of God’s revelation’

p 7, John Sailhamer, The Pentateuch as Narrative

Listening to the author's intentions through paying attention to the literary design

- 1) Cain and Abel narrative: we will look at the questions God asks, which echo the Eden narrative
- 2) Two framing genealogies: Adam to Noah; and Shem to Abram: we will look at the number 10 and repeated phrases
- 3) Noah and the flood: we will look at the phrases which echo the Genesis 1 creation narrative
- 4) The Tower of Babylon: we will look at the hourglass structure

1) Cain and Abel

Literary unit begins and ends with Eve's son Cain, then Abel; and finishes with another son, Seth replacing Abel

Repeated questions: another fall narrative

Where are you? (to Adam) Where is your brother Abel? (to Cain)

What is this you have done? (to Eve) What have you done (to Cain)

Message: Sin - the spirit being, animal creature - that gains dominance over humans, demonstrates what happens when humans seek to rule in their own wisdom: they lose authority

Innocent blood cries out from the ground

7 generations Adam via Cain's line is Lamech: the 'fulness' of the fruit of death: a violent man boasts of killing a youth in vengeance and for the first time in the biblical account, takes two wives

2) Two genealogies trace the seed of the woman

The biblical authors shape the material to communicate their message: in this case – despite living East of Eden, where there is death there is also a messianic hope

Adam to Noah – 10 generations

Note: 'and then he died'

Enoch walked with God – no repetition

Noah to Abraham - 10 generations

no mention of death

10 is wholeness or completion, like 7

10 creative words anticipating 10 plagues and the 10 words (commandments) given to Moses on the mountain

10x7 table of nations

10x7 sons of Jacob at the end of Genesis go into Egypt

10 'toledot' accounts: 5 primeval, 5 patriarchal in the book of Genesis

Genesis and other ANE creation and flood stories

Humans are created to reign as God's Image bearers, invited into intimacy

Humans choose to rule in their own wisdom, and as a consequence violence fills the earth. The blood of the innocent cries out for justice

Yahweh is broken-hearted at the violence and blood shed in the world, and seeks to bring justice and cleanse the world from evil through sending a catastrophic flood

Yahweh ultimately wants to preserve humanity and so commands Noah to build an ark to save himself, his wife, their three sons and their three wives, and the animals

After the flood, Noah makes a sacrifice to Yahweh Elohim, and Yahweh Elohim makes a covenant with Noah and every living thing promising he will never the destroy the earth again with a flood

Humans are created as slaves to relieve the lesser gods of having to work to feed the greater gods

Humans are noisy and over populating the earth, and so the gods destroy humanity through sending a catastrophic flood

One god wants to save humanity from eradication, so in subterfuge tells a human to build an ark and place his family and animals on board, to be protected during the storm.

The saved human sacrifices to the gods after flood, and an argument ensues between the gods.

3) Noah and the flood: justice looks like accelerating the de-creation process

De-creation in order to bring re-creation: mercy

3) Noah and the flood: justice looks like accelerating the de-creation process

Starts with a fall narrative: the sons of Elohim see beautiful daughters of humans and take: this is a transgression, and the result is violence across the land

God hands humans over to the consequences of their choices, but in this case out of mercy accelerates the process

Day 3 is reversed – the waters cover the dry land

Day 2 is reversed – the waters above the dome (raqia) and the waters below are released; until they return to the watery abyss of the pre-creation state of Genesis 1.2

Universal language – to make a point about the universality of the human condition

Distinct time periods are highly symbolic – periods of 7 days, but also a 40 day flood
40 speaks of exile (the Israelites 40 years, Jesus' 40 days in the wilderness)

De-creation in order to bring re-creation: mercy

Comparing Genesis 1 with Genesis 8-9

The Spirit (ruach) of God hovers over the waters (Gen 1. 2); God sent a wind (ruach) over the earth and the waters receded (Gen 8.1)

Day 2 – waters separated again

Day 3 – dry land appears

Day 5 – birds released into the sky

Day 6 – animals released onto the land

Day 6 – humans blessed again to be fruitful and multiply

Day 6 – humans called again to rule over the land

Day 6 – humans given food, this time with animal meat

A sacrifice pleases God, reminiscent of Abel's sacrifice

God responds with a poem, promising to meet humanity's need: reversing the order of their delivery in Genesis 1: time, weather, food

Here: food, weather, time – all needed for human flourishing on the dry land

New Eden: a man at peace with the animals, on a mountain, given a blessing, where he plants a vineyard

One prohibition in this new Eden in a poem: Whoever sheds human blood, by humans shall their blood be shed; for in the image of God, God has made humanity

COVENANT God shows his commitment to partner with humans, and makes his first covenant

Finishes with Noah's FALL narrative: a man 'of the soil' plants a vineyard, but gets drunk and is naked and exposed

4) Tower of Babel (Babylon) literary structure helps express meaning

Hourglass structure:

Narrative: Now the whole world had one language and a common speech. As people moved eastward, they found a plain in Shinar and settled there.

Dialogue: They said to each other...Then they said come let us

CENTRAL PASSAGE: But the Lord came down to see the city and the tower the people were building

Dialogue: The Lord said... Come let us

Narrative: So the Lord scattered them from there over the city... the Lord scattered them

Communication: In Yahweh's eyes - Babel is an anti-Eden

The hourglass structure of the Tower of Babel

Narrative

Dialogue

Central Passage

Dialogue

Narrative



What Yahweh sees...

Throughout the Hebrew Bible, the reader / listener is now trained to see whose eyes we are looking through – humans distorted vision of good and evil, or Yahweh's clear vision

The Lord **looked** with favour on Abel's offering

The Lord **saw** how great the 'ra' of the human race had become on the land,

Now the earth was corrupt **in God's sight** and full of violence

God saw how corrupt it had become for all the people on the earth had corrupted their ways

The Lord came down **to see** the city

How the biblical authors express the Genesis ideal:

The invitation is to walk with God, to live by faith, to walk in step with the Spirit, to be full of the power of God's Spirit, to live by God's wisdom, to love by God's love

The promise is that if we live like that then life, human flourishing and abundance will be the hall mark of our life

The warning is that if we resist this generous invitation, and choose to redefine for ourselves what is good and evil, we will cause suffering, destruction, and death wherever we go

Gilgamesh epic

People pray to the gods to help them with their young impetuous king.

The gods create Enkidu who runs with the wild animals, but sleeps with a prostitute so enters the city. He is angry with Gilgamesh for sleeping with all the brides of the city on their wedding night.

They wrestle, Gilgamesh wins, but Enkidu and Gilgamesh become friends and go on adventures together.

Ishtar, the goddess of love and war proposes a relationship with Gilgamesh having seen him naked, but he insults her, so she goes to her father Anu the god of heaven and asks for vengeance; at the same time Anu kills Enkidu.

As Enkidu is dying in Gilgamesh's arms, he realises one day he will, too, die and seeks out the flood hero Uta-napishti - the only human who has eternal life. Uta-napishti tells him the flood story.

Enlil and the gods want to destroy humanity completely because of their noise and overpopulation. However, Ea told Uta-napishti to build a large ark and save a seed of all living things (animals). He does, also taking in gold, silver, his family, and the builders.

The flood is so terrible that even the gods screamed and cowered at the might of the flood.

The Ark rests on Mount Nimush and after seven days, Uta-napishti releases a dove (which returns), a swallow (which returns), and a raven (which doesn't return).

Uta-napishti offers the gods a sacrifice, for being spared. But Enlil angry that humans have survived. Ea tells him to manage overpopulation with less extreme measures: predatory animals, pestilence or famine.

Uta-napishti becomes immortal because Enlil came into their ship and blessed them to be gods.

Gilgamesh then realises that eternal life was an given in an exceptional circumstance, and so not accessible to him.

He returns to his city matured and chastened, recognising his afterlife lies in his legacy as king; and so the original prayers to the gods are answered.

My synopsis from Temper Longman III and John Walton, p. 53-87, The Lost World of the Flood

Yuval Noah Harari: 21 Lessons for the 21st Century, p.204

The Six values of the Secular Ideal:

Truth

Compassion

Equality

Freedom

Courage

Responsibility

We think we are reading the Bible, but we soon realise the Bible is reading us: the Bible is a prophetic book which reveals to the spiritually blind, how God sees things – which is how they really are – in order that we may see clearly



The Hebrew Bible holds up person after person after person who fails to live by God's wisdom through echoes of the creation and Eden narratives; the Hebrew Bible exposes the human need, but also promises that a human who will meet that need

We think we are reading the Bible, but we realise the Bible is reading us: the Bible is a prophetic book revealing to the spiritually blind, how God sees things – which is how they really are – in order that we may see ourselves clearly

The New Testament is a prophetic witness to Jesus who meets our need every way: the second Adam, and faithful Israelite, who succeeds fully in living by God's wisdom.

We need the Father, Jesus, and the Spirit

Abel's blood points to Jesus – the blood that speaks a better word

The two genealogies point to the ancestry of Jesus

Noah's ark points to Jesus's invitation of restoration

Babel is reversed at Pentecost – the Spirit is poured out on many nations who are all gathered together in Jerusalem so they can all hear God in their own languages, and then are scattered back to their homes to bring blessing to the nations