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A Heartbroken God Deals with Rebellion: A Theology of Calamity Based on the Flood Story (Genesis 6:5-9:17)

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God created a good world and wills the well-being of all creation. Humankind, however, has sinned against God from the very beginning, following its own will and keeping its ways that oppose the loving and good will of the creator for the creation's well-being. The foregoing study has established the Old Testament understanding that what we now call natural calamities are acts of God through nature, in judgment of a world that has turned against God. Judgment, however, is to be understood as God's action of transforming a corrupt world towards wholeness and well-being. The study of the text and related interpretational resources point to the sovereignty and power of God who uses nature as instrument for judgment and blessing. God, therefore, deals with the corruption of the world by humankind and paves the way for renewal and blessing, though not without pain and grief on God's part.

Keywords: natural calamity, judgment, theology of nature, sin, well-being

For someone who grew up in a farm, the realization that one's well-being is dependent on nature comes naturally. In such an environment, God's love and providence is almost always experienced through nature. This is especially appreciated by the covenant community who professed that God fought against their enemies using natural phenomena: water, frogs, insects, fire, hail, wind, and sea (cf. Exo 7ff).

In view of the recent devastations wrought by typhoons and other

natural calamities in the Philippines, this paper attempts at understanding the function and purpose of the story of the flood in the Old Testament. That people call on God for salvation in the midst of life-threatening situations, particularly natural calamities, is a concrete index of connection between God and nature; however, the destructiveness of natural calamities appears to contradict the concept of a loving, providential God. How does the Old Testament make sense of this contradiction? How is God's character and God's relationship with human persons portrayed in the story of the Deluge in view of its destructiveness?

TRANSLATION NOTES AND INSIGHTS

Genesis 6:5-8. Coming from the hand of J,^[1] the state of wickedness of human beings is assessed through and through. The verbs used such as nacham(translated sorry) and atsab (grieved)^[2] which are in Hebrew Niphal and Hithpael stems, respectively, can be translated as reflexive which underscores God's feelings. Read in the context of the story, the state of wickedness should be understood as caused by human rejection of God's will for the well-being of a whole created order. Such state compelled God's action of wiping out disorder to give way to a new beginning.

But Noah found grace in the eyes of the Lord (i.e. wa+noun). This is a sharp contrast to the succession of three wa+imperfect verbs which are followed by long verses preceding Gen 6:8^[3] where a contrastive view, as should be noted, is introduced: "But , Noah found grace in the eyes of the Lord." The succeeding verse mentions that Noah was a just man perfect in his generation. P leaves no doubt as to Noah's righteousness.

In each of the two verses (i.e. vs. 12, 13), a two-fold reiteration of the earth's corruption and of all flesh upon it (v.12, J) was intensified (v. 13, P) as further corruption bred among other creatures of flesh and on the earth. P stresses that human beings' end had come (6:13 construct translated, "end of").

7:11-12. The concept of a world built upon the deep, protected by the firmament, (P) was threatened as the foundation of the deep (tehom) burst forth and the vaults of the dome (heaven/firmament) were opened so that the

1 Based on the generally accepted documentary hypothesis proposing that the first five books are a composite work reworked by a priestly writer using three main sources J for Yahwist, E for Elohist, D for Deuteronomist, and P for the materials supplied by Priestly editors.

2 Translation based on Rudolf Kittel, *Biblica Hebraica*, 7th Edition, Wurttembergische Bibelanstalt:1973), 8-12.

3 Thomas O. Lambdin, *Introduction to Biblical Hebrew* (New York: Charles Scribner's & Sons, 1971), 162-3.

primeval waters above and below raged upon the created order. The Priestly writer gives a picture of how the earth nearly resorted back to the primordial chaos in Genesis 1:2. The rains came for forty days and forty nights, and the waters rose, and only by God's provision of the ark did Noah's family and the animals with them survived.

7: 21-22; 23. The priestly writer stresses the severity of the deluge swelling so mightily, mentioning that it covered the tallest mountains and destroyed all flesh upon the earth: birds, creeping creatures, animals, and human beings. Both P and J summarize how God's intended outcome was accomplished, with only Noah and those in the ark surviving the deluge.

8:1. "But God remembered Noah" and caused a wind to blow. P's comment brings to mind J's strong east wind (see Exodus 14:21 which has been sandwiched with P's insertions).

8:2-19. God closed the vaults of the deep and the windows of heaven, and the place below the dome and above the deep was again made safe for human and animal habitation -- a renewed creation. The waters subsided until Noah and those in the ark were instructed to come out of the ark.

8:20-22. The resumption of sacrifice functioned to set things right as this act pleased God who, upon smelling the pleasant aroma, made a promise to sustain the constancy of the cycle of life. J portrays God as thinking aloud, stressing the point of the verses 21-22. Sacrifices in these verses served to remind God to make allowances for human beings who were indeed sinful, and therefore God promised not to again blot out the living creatures. The after-flood blessing was the same blessing given to the human beings after their creation. But while God (P) in Genesis 1:29 allowed only a plant-based diet, here, human beings were allowed to eat meat (9:3). In Genesis 2:17, J notes the prohibition to eat the fruit from the tree of the knowledge of good and evil, and P in chapter 9: 4-6 notes the prohibition to eat flesh with lifeblood in it, requiring a reckoning from human beings and beasts. These are the stipulations upon which the covenant promise -- never to cut off all flesh and destroy the earth by the waters of the flood again (9:8-17) -- is based.

LITERARY AND TRADITION CRITICISM

The Ancient Near Eastern parallel story of the flood tells of the decision by the gods to destroy the human race for the noise they made, which the gods had

not anticipated.^[4] But Ea, one of the gods, took pity on humankind and devised a way to inform Uta-Napishtim,^[5] instructing him to build a ship. Obligated by Ea's order, Uta-Napishtim took his family and herded animals and birds to the ark. The terror of the catastrophe frightened even the gods who "crouched like dogs on the ramparts and their burning lips quivered with fright."^[6] The waters receded on the seventh day and the gods were happy to smell the pleasant odor of the sacrifice except for the god Enlil who planned the deluge. In Genesis, the mentioned reason for the deluge was moral corruption.

Von Rad, in his commentary to the book of Genesis, notes that the Yahwist flood story was planned "very skillfully," starting with a glimpse of God's "grieving heart" expressing the resolve in God's own words. The J flood story ends with "[t]he same condition, which in the prologue is the basis for God's judgment, [and]the epilogue reveals God's grace and providence."^[7] Further, Shimon Bar-Efrat, author of what is considered a groundbreaking work on Biblical narratives, *The Art of Biblical Narrative*, points to the importance of introducing God's thoughts and feelings in this passage which biblical authors rarely do, or would only do as a "matter of special importance."^[8] For the J writer the Flood was a divine exercise of God's sovereignty. This action was called for in view of human wickedness that appears to spin out of bounds. Yet, the divine feeling is not anger but pain and grief, for it is God who created nature. However, God found favor with a righteous man. God took the initiative of revealing what would happen to Noah and gave him instructions for human being's salvation.

The interweaving of J and P's works do produce a seemingly unified account, but the narrative presents two differing versions of the flood story is summarized below:^[9]

Yahwist	Priestly
wickedness of human beings	human being's corruption of the earth
God's regret for creating human beings	no mention of regret

4 Richard J. Clifford (Introduction and comment on Genesis 1:1-25:18) *The New Jerome Biblical Commentary* Raymond E. Brown et.al. eds. (London: Jeoffrey Chapman, 1968), 15.

5 Some sources use the name Atra-khasis see for example Albert T. Clay, *The Origin of the Biblical Traditions* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1923), 146-47.

6 Richard Aldington & Delano Ames trans., *New Larousse Encyclopedia of Mythology* (New York. London. Sydney: Hamlyn, 1959), 62-3.

7 Gerhard von Rad, *Genesis: A Commentary* (London: SMC Press, 1956), 118-19.

8 Shimon Bar-Efrat, *The Art of Biblical Narrative* (Sheffield, England: Sheffield Press, 1997), 19.

9 In this story the parts attributed to J are 6: 5-8; 7:1-10; 12,16b, 17b, 22-23; 8:6-11, 13b, 20-22; the rest comes from the hand of P. See John Skinner, *A Critical and Exegetical Commentary on Genesis*. *The International Critical Commentary* (Edinburgh: Charles Scribner's Sons, 1956),148.

destruction of human beings and animals	destruction of all flesh, all life on earth
seven pairs of clean animals and a pair from the unclean ones	a pair from every kind of animal
forty days and forty nights rain	a flood of waters over the earth for one hundred fifty days.
flood duration: 40 days plus 21 days	flood duration: 12 months plus 10 days
dry land on the twenty -seventh day of second month	dry land on the first day of the first of the month
assurance of the constancy of the seasons	blessing and unconditional covenant with Noah that all flesh and all the earth will not be destroyed by such a flood again

THE LITERARY CONTEXT OF GEN 6:1–9:17

Gen 6:1-9:17 in the Primeval History

The primeval history can be divided into three sections (Gen 1:1-11:32)

I. Genesis 1:-4:16. Creation and the first Human Beings

1. Gen 1:11-26. The first creation story
2. Gen 2:1-24. The second creation story
3. Gen 3:1-24. The expulsion from the garden
4. Gen 4:1-16. The story of Cain and Abel
5. Gen 4:17-26. Cain's descendants
6. Genesis 5:1-32. The Descendants of Adam and Eve

II. Genesis 6:1-9:28. Story of Noah and the Flood

1. Gen 6:1-9. Prologue to the flood story
2. Gen 6:9-22. Noah and the flood
3. Gen 7:1-8:19. The flood
4. Gen 8:20- 9:17. Covenant and blessing after the flood
5. Gen 9:18-28. Noah's sons
6. Genesis 10:1-32. The Descendants of Noah

III. Genesis 11:1-9. The Story of the Tower of Babel

Genesis 11:10-32. Descendants of Shem

It is remarkable that the flood story, which filled up nearly five pages, was given a relatively larger space by the biblical writers compared to the other four stories which, all together, occupied six pages of the first section. Affirming the importance of the story to J and P, S.R. Driver notes that the flood story is described in “minuteness”.^[10] The importance of the story of the flood is further underscored by the fact that P interweaves into the existing tradition which predates P by more than 400 years.^[11] This points to P’s familiarity and interest in the story. As Driver notes, “he combines into one the double narratives than was usually his practice, and in parts slightly modifying the phraseology” which, as Driver points out, is P’s way of delving into theology of the matter at hand.^[12]

Skinner notes that J anticipates a better future and that the prophetic theme of judgment is not prominent in J, in spite of the fact that this section already concerns judgment. J’s sources were “low literature” which was not from the literate classes. Shaped in religious gatherings and covenant renewal, the oral traditions served to “validate and strengthen the intertribal movement of Israel” in their desire to “determine their own lives without intervention” from the Canaanite city rulers who imposed the rule of upper classes upon them.^[13] The stories were recited and transmitted in community covenant renewal gatherings. These stories were later used by the redactor J to legitimize the transition from tribal confederacy to monarchy. Meanwhile, P, coming from the elite class who were forcibly relocated to Babylon, sought to reorganize the Jewish life and community after the destruction of Jerusalem that caused the dispersion of Jews.

Though far from Jerusalem, the hopes and aspirations of the dispersed Jews were still tied to their homeland. Gottwald describes the common experience of the people: “All Jews, whether restored in Judah or colonized abroad, were subject to the sovereign power of the great empires that successively ruled them.”^[14]

With the city of Jerusalem destroyed and burned and the people exiled without any form of organization, the Jews who remained in Judah would have to contend with possible intrusion into their land by the neighboring nations like the Edomites in the south and the Amonites and Moabites across the Jordan. Many would have survived mainly by farming, though under the watchful eyes of their colonizers. Most of the neighboring peoples were hostile to them. Due to

10 S.R. Driver, *An Introduction to the Literature of the Old Testament* (New York: Charles Scribner’s Sons, 1931), 12.

11 Skinner dates the final redaction of the Pentateuchal materials by P to later than 444 B.C.E., while J’s latest dating is the 9th century. Some scholars point to as early as the 10th century B.C.E. John Skinner, *A Critical and Exegetical*..., Iv, lxiv.

12 S.R. Driver, *An Introduction*..., 21, 129. Driver notes that P who does not dwell so much on the deeper problems of theology but notes Gen 5:4-6 :9 as an exception.

13 Norman K. Gottwald, *The Hebrew Bible - A Socio-Literary Introduction* (Philadelphia: Fortress Press, 1985), 142.

14 *Ibid.*, 421.

scant resources and the hostility of neighbors, building the temple (i.e. sponsored by Persia) and the wall of Jerusalem took a long time. As mentioned by the post-exilic prophets (Joel 1; Haggai 1:10, Joel 1:2ff., Malachi 3:11), the life of those who came back to Jerusalem was made more difficult by calamities.

While the Jews in Babylon, Egypt and other lands would have adapted, and some eventually might have flourished, the Jews in Israel lived like foreigners in their own land, adjusting to a different culture. Considered outsiders, they experienced exploitation, marginalization and discrimination, and were treated as second class citizens. In the absence of the temple and religious leadership, many of them, no doubt, converted to other religions or simply stopped observing their faith. In fact, Gottwald mentions that many of the Jews who were living among the other races would have become indistinguishable since Jewish synagogues came only after worship and religious leadership was restored in Jerusalem, more than a century after the destruction of Jerusalem.^[15] For the Jews, assimilation itself demanded and required adapting to a new way life and forgetting or neglecting one's own identity.

The Persian policy of consolidating indigenous communities as the basis for colonial rule had certainly helped in reconstituting Jewish faith, life, and identity for those in Jerusalem and those dispersed in other lands. But history is replete with stories of how the Jews whether living in Palestine or in other countries suffered persecution and discrimination for simply being Jews.

THE MYTHOPOEIC WORLDVIEW

Genesis chapters 1-11 are collectively called by biblical scholars as the primeval history which belongs to a “pre-literary and uncritical stage of society”, comparable to legends and myths.^[16] These stories, however, have greater value than mere historical narration of events. A people's myth “reveals the soul of a people, its instinctive selection of the types of character which represent its moral aspiration, its conception of its own place and mission in the world; and also to some indeterminate extent the impact of its subconscious life of the historic experiences in which it first woke up to the consciousness of national unity and destiny.”^[17] Though Israel's understanding of their prehistoric background has been shaped largely by the

15 Ibid., 427.

16 Skinner, *A Critical and Exegetical...*, v.

17 Ibid. Skinner defines myth as those that have to do with gods and heavenly phenomena, while legends are based on historical figures.

more advanced civilization around them, they are not passive recipients of the world views of their neighbors. On the contrary, they used the traditions they were familiar with to express their own understanding of reality.^[18]

This way of representing perception of reality is universal. As an encyclopedia of myths claim, "...myths and legends are a universal human invention. They have arisen at different times and in different places, as explanations of the critical problems that always face people. Among their important concerns are the purpose for living, misfortune, success, cruelty, love, and fertility, magic, power, war, accident, chance, madness, creation and the nature of the universe."^[19] The richness of the stories suggests a very deep source in the human psyche that expresses how the early civilizations particularly Israel conceived of the world, of gods, and of human beings.^[20]

Our ancestors captured the imagination of the common people in the form of short stories which were passed on, told, and retold because they were found to be meaningful and relevant to the issues human ancestors faced. Skinner argues that studying the stories in isolation will allow the stories to speak for themselves, enabling the reader to have a better appreciation of these stories.^[21]

THE CENTRAL THEME OF THE FLOOD STORY

The 11 chapters of the primeval history devote two chapters to creation, one chapter (Gen 3) to the disobedience of human beings, one chapter to the story of the brothers Cain and Abel (Gen 4), one chapter to the table of the nations, less than 10 verses to the story of Babel, and a considerable part of chapter 11 to genealogies.^[22] P and J have chosen a story where there is relative scarcity of water, which is not a local phenomenon in Israel. J situates creation in the barren dry ground, which becomes alive and fertile only with the rain and cultivation of Yahweh (Gen 2:4b-24). P makes use of the Babylonian/Amorite primeval chaos of the deep (tehom) as the pre-creation reality. The two creation stories, therefore, have the idea of reversion to primeval emptiness as depicted in the famine-causing droughts (J) and to chaos in all its forms (P). Both traditionists tap the story of the flood to point out the importance

18 Ibid., x.

19 Arthur Cotterell, *The Macmillan Illustrates Encyclopedia of Myths and Legends* (New York: Macmillan, 1989), 7

20 Ibid., 8

21 Skinner, *A Critical and Exegetical...*, xiv-iv.

22 Julius Bewer also notices that P "tarried to tell the story of the deluge." Julius Bewer, *The Literature of the Old Testament* (New York and London: Columbia University Press, 1962), 274.

of the theme of judgment in the following contexts: 1) security and stability of the Davidic and Northern kingdoms (J); and 2) the destruction of Jerusalem, and the dispersion and colonial experience of the Jews (P).

The deterioration of creation, a scheme which many biblical scholars have noted in the way the materials were arranged,^[23] serves as a clue to the theme of the story. In the flood story, the earth was corrupted by human wickedness, necessitating whole-scale destruction except for a man who had found favor in God's sight. Fohrer states that the flood story contributes to J's purpose of illustrating the fulfillment of "God's promises of territory and descendants and his helping intervention (though) met time and time again by human failures and threatened disaster." J's basic theology anchors on "the victory of God's dominion in the face of the nation's enemies and Israel itself, as well as the establishment and preservation of a close relationship with God despite Israel's rebellions."^[24] J, according to Fohrer, uses tradition "to trace history back to its beginnings, interpreting all events from the standpoint of sin, the dissolution of fellowship with God, and of judgment, the victory of God's dominion over the sinner."^[25]

God's triumph over human failure, as underscored by J, is taken over by P's graphical description of the threat of chaos over the created order. In the overall scheme of human wickedness and corruption of creation, God's salvific work is accomplished through the righteous ones whom God will not forget. The same thought is proposed by Brevard Childs' assertion that "Israel's redemptive role in the reconciliation of the nations was purposed from the beginning and subsumed within the eschatological framework of the book."^[26] On the account of the righteous ones, the world was saved and a covenant where God made allowances for the sinfulness of human beings was initiated. Based on God's faithfulness and grace alone God's creation will endure. P then paves the way for a nobler race of people that bore Shem, the ancestor of the Jews.

Clearly, the earth is depicted as theocentric where God, the creator, sustains all creation. Nothing and no one stands on its own. In the words of Bernhard Anderson, "(N)othing is independent, self-created, self-sustaining. Indeed, if it were not for the Creator's power, which is the source and vitality

23 Georg Fohrer, *Introduction to the Old Testament* (London: S.P.C.K., 1976), 148.

24 Ibid. p. 149.

25 Ibid. The theme of judgment for human beings' wickedness is also identified by Julius Beyer, *The Literature of the Old Testament* (New York and London: Columbia University Press, 1962), 68.

26 Brevard S. Childs, *Introduction to the Old Testament as Scripture* (Philadelphia: Fortress Press, 1979), 155.

of all that exists, the world would revert to primeval, meaningless chaos.”^[27]

The flood story was cherished by rural folks against the backdrop of powerful civilizations and empires that had them at their mercy. Situated mainly in the hill country of Canaan and beyond the reach of floods, the community of rural cultivators, which almost threatened the imperial centers of the plains vis-à-vis Egypt, cherished the action of a righteous God who checked the increasing wickedness of humankind.

From the point of view of the traditionists and their sources, creation is an intricate and marvelous system of workmanship sustained by God. It was entrusted to human beings’ care who are also a part of creation and whose well-being derives from creation. Limitations had been set and laws emanating from the hand of the sovereign creator had been instituted for the maintenance of order and well-being. Sin is seen not only as an act but a “cosmic disorder” where the physical evil originates from the moral evil.^[28] In the flood story, God responds in judgment to cosmic evil. P describes the world as corrupted by humankind whose thoughts and inclinations were only evil all the time (Gen 6:12).

Nonetheless, the biblical narrator takes special effort to convey grief on the part of God. Moreover, the pivotal role of Gen 8:1 (P) in the understanding of the flood story is supported by the use of chiasm.^[29] That is, in judgment, God finds favor with the righteous and remembers them.

Both J and P then appear to share the same understanding that God’s judgment is always tempered by grace. Such grace is made evident by J and P as the story reveals that God made adjustments in dealing with human beings who were sinful by nature and gave them an unconditional promise of safety and security after the flood, although they had not yet proven anything.

J and P’s theology of the flood, put together in time of national crisis, is surprisingly theocentric. Noah was completely silent throughout. Both P and J affirm God’s complete sovereignty, God’s grace, and God’s pain, glossing over what Noah had to say or his feelings or how human beings suffered on account of the flood.

27 Anderson, *Understanding ...*, 457.

28 John L. Mackenzie S.J., *Myths and Realities: Studies in Biblical Theology* (Milwaukee: the Bruce Publishing Company, 1963), 120.

29 See Richard Clifford, et. al. *The New Jerome Bible Commentary* Raymond E. Brown (Englewood Cliffs, Prentice Hall, 1990), 15. Frick credits the chiastic analysis of the passage by Gordon Wenham, showing that the structure highlights God’s intervention as a pivotal point of the passage. Frank S. Frick, *A Journey through the Hebrew Scriptures* (Forth Worth/Philadelphia: Harcourt Brace College Publishers, 1995), 142-44

GENESIS 6:5-9:17 AS A BASIS FOR CONSTRUCTING A THEOLOGY OF NATURE

The dispersion of God's people from the Promised Land and the destruction of the temple and Jerusalem were the points of departure for the Priestly editor. All the signs of God's election of Israel and Judah were lost in what Bernhard Anderson calls national disaster. To J and his sources, human sin in the face of the righteousness of God is a threat to the realization of blessings. But God's plan triumphs in spite of human sin. As God's plan always triumphs, being God's people entails accountability and responsibility. For P, Israel emerged from judgment and suffering with enlarged vision and revitalized faith. Israel had a unique place and task of being an instrument of God's saving acts among the nations (J and P). A theology that is also prominent in Isaiah is the form of a suffering servant concept.

Old Testament understanding of divine intervention is always connected to the transformative "presence, purpose, and power" of God in the history and human life.^[30] Calamities as God's acts, serve the overall purpose of God to restore order and well-being. Calamities are not understood as punitive but redemptive, in the same way that God used the forces of nature to redeem Israel from slavery in Egypt. God is not interested in preserving the status-quo but in transforming it to restore well-being. Thus, the prophets later expected Israel to understand this message brought by natural calamities (e.g., droughts, locust infestation, even war) that were willed by God and by the land towards transformation and well-being. Having a strong awareness that they were God's people and that they had attendant responsibilities and accountabilities as God's people, Israel never lost the vision of a transformed world that God would surely accomplish, despite Israel's failure.

As the foundational literature of the reconstituted faith community, the primeval history's place in Genesis cannot be overestimated. Primeval history provides orientation for Israel's place in the over-all scheme of things, making possible a life of meaning and purpose despite suffering. As Israel is a small nation amidst much bigger nations in a land where living has been precarious due to the acts of nature and humankind, Israel's history, however one looks at it, can be characterized as calamitous. The flood story which is a familiar story, has undoubtedly served to inspire confidence in the reliability of the God-ordered creation.

30 Walter Brueggeman, *Reverberations of Faith* (Louisville. London: Westminster John Knox Press, 2002), 130.

Understanding the flood story as basis for a theology that views natural calamities as God's instrument in dealing with a sinful world naturally derives from the story. But behind the instrument the "... image of God focuses less on judgment (no anger language?)... (t)han on sorrow, pain, disappointment, regret...and mercy..."^[31] In contemplating catastrophes, the biblical writers emphasize God's act of saving rather than making human beings suffer. This act not only concerns individual person such as Noah but also God's people as agents of transforming human beings and the whole of creation towards well-being. The transformative understanding of calamity brings into focus the saving activity of God who is at work in nature pertaining to humankind and creation.^[32] Calamity is explained as God's means of asserting God's will over that of humankind. As Fretheim observes, "Repetitions of 6:5 and 8:21 are linked formally and thematically, centering on God's relationship to a sin-filled world."^[33]

God's speeches in the flood serve as a "divine rationale for sending the flood, a vision of the world from God's viewpoint."^[34] As part of the primeval history, the story of the flood stresses the issue of what is called today as natural calamities. As Fretheim further asserts, "[T]he flood story focuses on God as well as God's decisions and commitments regarding the creation."^[35]

As acts of God, calamities have to do with sin. God in the Old Testament is the one who "...creates, governs, and wills a world of well-being with and for all of God's creatures... sin is the violation of God's will for that world of well-being willed by the creator God."^[36] Brueggeman clarifies that "(s)in is a distortion or violation of that proper ordering of creatureliness through a refusal to be dependent and responsive." Identified later with the Torah through which Israel attempted to build an egalitarian society in practical ways, the violation of the law is considered "a disordering of the relation to the creator and to the creator's will for the creature."^[37] Sin as understood and taken by the Yahwist and Priestly writers has reached its limits and hence, has to be dealt with in a decisive way. Bringing in the social and structural view of sin helps one understand the point of view of the former slaves and the colonized minorities attempting to build and rebuild an egalitarian

31 Terence E. Fretheim, "The Book of Genesis Introduction, Commentary, and Reflections" New Interpreter's Bible Vol. 1 (Nashville: Abingdon Press, 1994), 389.

32 Ibid.

33 Ibid., 388.

34 Ibid. Richard J. Clifford, identifies 4 divine addresses in the story (6:13-22; 7:1-10; 8:15-19; 9:1-17), The New Jerome..., 16-17.

35 Fretheim, NIB, 395.

36 Brueggeman, Reverberations ...,195.

37 Ibid.,196.

community based on their covenant relationship with God. To quote Gustavo Gutierrez, “(S)in is regarded as a social-historical fact referring to the absence of brotherhood and love among men, the breach of friendship with God and with other men, and, therefore, the interior, personal fracture.”^[38] The flood story further broadens sin to include human beings’ alienation from nature as sin corrupts the created order.

God’s act of creation is understood as the first act of salvation of a world corrupted by human beings, and this hence necessitates renewal. The flood served to reverse the act of self-destruction. Surely, the liberation of Israel from Egypt would always be Israel’s perspective for understanding the acts of God. Moral and social corruption has threatened Israel as God’s creation.

After the flood, God, as storywriters portray, had changed the way of engaging evil: from a “flood-like response” to one where “God (takes) the route of suffering...” and endures ‘a relationship with a sinful world.’^[39] God initiates an enduring covenant that ensures the continuity of human life despite the sorrow, grief, and pain such covenant would cause.

Thus, in the foundational stories of Israel, calamity in its devastating form is God’s agent of transformation in the face of cosmic corruption. Nevertheless, the story is also used as a medium of teaching the nature of Yahweh. Though based on a tradition shared by Israel’s neighbors, the story was significantly changed by the writers so that “... the details inherited from the popular tradition do not obscure the central view that Yahweh, the sole God, acts in human affairs in a meaningful and consistent way (in contrast to the caprice of the Babylonian deities).”^[40] In view of Israel’s faith, God stands out singularly as a God of grace and justice.

A BIBLICAL THEOLOGY OF CALAMITY

The understanding of the flood story as Israel’s theology of calamity is consistent with the origin of the story itself as well as the context of its transmission. Skinner, noting the existence of the story of the Deluge in the memory of so many ancient civilizations, understands the story as a common memory of an ancient cataclysmic event which had been carried by the various branches of human race in their dispersion.^[41] Skinner elaborates on

38 Gustavo Gutierrez, *A Theology of Liberation* (New York, Orbis Books, 1973), 175.

39 Fretheim, NIB, 396.

40 Ibid., 396.

41 Skinner, *ibid.*, 174-5. Clay further noted the existence of Sumerian, Greek, Assyrian and Amorite deluge stories.

the preservation and transmission of the tradition: "(T)he most reasonable line of explanation... is that the great majority of the legends preserve the collection of local catastrophes such as inundations, tidal waves, seismic floods accompanied by cyclones, etc., of which many historical examples are recorded..."^[42] Von Rad has the same opinion, noting that the similarities among the numerous flood stories "...require the assumption of an actual cosmic experience and a primitive recollection, which, to be sure, is often clouded and in part often brought to new life and revised only later by local floods."^[43]

The connection of the flood story to actual calamities is supported by the fact that the earlier version of the deluge story, which was written thirteen centuries earlier, did not only mention the deluge but also referred to a famine.^[44] Clay and Skinner's propositions are important as they point to the fact that the origin of the flood story and its transmission is located in the context of calamities.

Israel confesses that Yahweh is the creator and asserts the "singular, unchallengeable sovereignty of Yahweh" by asserting that Yahweh controls the chaos monsters (Job 40:15-24, 41:1-34) and the floodwaters of the cosmos (Job 38:8-11, 25-33). Psalms 104:25-26 "assumes Yahweh's complete mastery of the threatening forces."^[45]

Hence, in place of a dualistic view which attributes destructive forces to one deity and salvation to another, "in Israel's testimony, there are no causes of destabilization of creation except the will of Yahweh, which in freedom and sovereignty can indeed destabilize the world, when Yahweh's sovereignty is excessively mocked and provoked."^[46]

However, this view of calamity only subsumes the opposing forces under one God holding both polarities in tension. This view fails to point out that the same forces were used by the same God to liberate God's people from Egypt, overthrowing an oppressive power. The one God, therefore, does not contradict Godself as the source of both blessing and curse but rather acts consistently, transforming humanity and creation towards wholeness and

42 Ibid.

43 Gerhard von Rad, *ibid.*, 120-1.

44 Clay, *ibid.*, 146-47. Clay though argues that the elements mentioned in the story is not consistent with Babylonian origin as there is very little rainfall in Babylon averaging only 2.80 to 4.98 inches annually, compared with 35.87 inches in some part of Egypt and 50 inches in Lebanon mountains which point to Amorite origin. Further that the names of the Gods and human characters were of Amorite origin. Amorite origin is also supported by the mention of springs (fountains of the deep) and mountains, which is not true at all in the context of Babylon.

45 Walter Brueggemann, *Theology of the Old Testament* (Minneapolis: Fortress Press, 1997) pp. 538. Scriptural citations by Brueggemann.

46 *Ibid.*, 538.

well-being. God is not a God who acts in anger when provoked, unleashing the “forces of curse and death... when... mocked”^[47] and creates order, redeems, and saves thereafter. On his part, Von Rad asserts that in calamities, God has “dominion over all life,”^[48] and such dominion is characterized by well-being.

Seeing transformation and salvation as God’s main intention behind the flood stresses values which maintain and sustain community well-being. This view also reinforces the values of egalitarianism and care for land and nature which the egalitarian society cherishes and preserves.^[49] The tradition nourished their faith in a God who delights in righteousness and acts decisively towards the appropriation of land and resources for community well-being and for the transformation of nations and the cosmos towards the realization of God’s will.

The picture of common people in Israel telling the story of God’s judgment of the advanced civilizations around her through the flood does make sense. Nature is an instrument of Yahweh’s judgment to curb sin and right the wrongs. The same concept is alluded to in Exodus when Egypt was struck by God using nature. In some prophetic writings, the prophets similarly understood natural calamities as sent by God (Amos 4:7-8; Jeremiah 5:24-25; Hosea 8:7, 9:14). Even pestilences were attributed to Yahweh (Lev 26:25; 2 Samuel 24:15). The assumption that God is the source of both blessing and “curse” is clear in Leviticus 26 and Deuteronomy 28, but it is not because God contradicts Godself. Instead, it is God’s way of guiding the people to the path that leads to life. In a sense, to conceive nature as one that is directed by the will of God is an extension of the understanding of God as the creator of all.

P, later following the Deuteronomistic theology,^[50] portrays Israel as the recipient of the same judgment as she lost all blessings attendant to her covenant with God; nevertheless, God did save the righteous ones who received the renewed blessings and commission.

A theology based on the flood story views the world as a sacred venue of God’s saving activity. Nature’s order and abundance is sustained as God’s law and order is followed. Nature is considered sacred as it was God who

47 Ibid.

48 Von Rad, *Genesis...*, 128.

49 Marilyn E.K. Clark notes that in the Genesis flood story justice in relation to non-human creation is given stress. See M. E. K. Clark, “A Flood of Justice: The Scope of Justice in the Flood Narrative (Gen. 6:5-9:19)” *International Journal of Public Theology* 3 (2009) 357–370

50 The theology based on the main teaching of Deuteronomy stating that observance of God’s law brings blessings while disobedience brings suffering.

planted the garden. Nature is not a closed system that mechanically functions on its own. It is the product of divine activity. We enjoy its abundance on God's terms. Sin destroys the created order, and nature is used by God to rein in sin. God continues to uphold creation and to relate to humankind in grace. Such a theology of nature is but the logical result of believing in one sovereign righteous God, whose power is at work towards the realization of well-being for all of God's creation.

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