

## NOAH, MEAT-EATING, AND THE FLOOD

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Genesis 9:3 is often used to justify meat-eating as God's will in the present age. At the same time, Genesis 9:3 is normally juxtaposed with Genesis 1:29 — in which humanity is given a vegan diet — with Genesis 9:3 as *de facto* annulling the previous scripture and inaugurating a new arrangement between God and humankind. In this essay I argue that the whole account of the Genesis Flood is far more nuanced than what is commonly understood, and that the story when read in its context is actually quite different from a superficial reading of the text. In particular, I see the passage in 9:3 *primarily* as a reluctant *concession* God is making to human weakness, ignorance and hard-heartedness.<sup>1</sup> More importantly, I hold that the story of Noah and the Flood narrates how God is forced to *temporarily* lower his standards in order not to have to definitively terminate his creation. After recognising that the human heart is filled with evil, YHWH attempts to regulate and limit the *very violence which had just brought about the destruction of the antediluvian world*. This is achieved in two ways: first, by codifying the punishment for murder, and second by regulating the eating of meat. In conclusion, I argue that far from being a positive moment in biblical history which should be celebrated, the Genesis Flood story and God's *initial* concession to eat meat actually highlights the hard-heartedness, rebellion, and violence of mankind, and the incredible patience and long-suffering of God towards humanity. Ultimately, viewed in the light of the cross, Genesis 9:3 showcases the amazing lengths God is willing to go to in order to redeem a lost humanity.

### 1. AN EARTH FULL OF VIOLENCE

In order to understand the biblical story of the Flood, it is crucial to seek to comprehend the overall context of the event. First, before the actual Flood narrative we are told that the 'sons of God' began to intermarry with the 'daughters of man':

<sup>1</sup>When man began to multiply on the face of the land and daughters were born to them,<sup>2</sup>the sons of God saw that the daughters of man were attractive. And they took as their wives any they chose.<sup>3</sup>Then the Lord said, "My Spirit shall not abide in man forever, for he is flesh: his days shall be 120 years."<sup>4</sup>The Nephilim were on the earth in those days, and also afterward, when the sons of God came in to the daughters of man and they bore children to them. These were the mighty men who were of old, the men of renown. (Gen. 6:1-4, ESV)

Much has been made of these verses, one interpretation being that the 'sons of God' were fallen angels that had sexual intercourse with women and bore giants, Nephilim, as children. In this interpretation, the birth

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<sup>1</sup> A popular interpretation is that the concession to eat meat was based on the lack of plant-food available after the Flood and the destruction it caused. While this is possible based on the context, it does not appear to fully explain the concession to eat meat, and why God did not rescind it after plant-food was again available. It may be that both explanations are true and a combination of factors brought about the change.

of the Nephilim, incredibly strong and tall demigods, was one of the reasons God destroyed the earth. While this interpretation is fairly popular it lacks strong scriptural support and seems to run contrary to the fact that Jesus affirmed that angels cannot marry.<sup>2</sup> A better interpretation for the text is simply that the God-fearing line — ‘the sons of God’ — of Seth ended up intermarrying with the evil line of Cain — ‘the daughters of man’.<sup>3</sup> By doing this it seems that the godly descendants of Seth came under the influence of their unbelieving wives, and their children also went in this direction. At this point, it appears that only Noah and his family still feared God and continued to walk by faith, while the rest of humanity sunk further and further into darkness.<sup>4</sup> We are told that, ‘Noah was a righteous man, blameless in his generation. Noah walked with God’. This is confirmed in 2 Peter 2:5: ‘if he did not spare the ancient world, but preserved Noah, a herald of righteousness, with seven others, when he brought a flood upon the world of the ungodly’ (ESV).

Interestingly, the Nephilim, which literally means ‘fallen ones’ or also ‘tyrants’, were considered ‘men of renown’ and ‘mighty men of old’. Here there is most probably an underlining on the part of Scripture of the difference between how these people were viewed by God and by men.<sup>5</sup> Paradoxically, while the world held them in high regard and considered them heroes, for God they were fallen and *violent* tyrants. Either way, the mixing of the sons of God and the daughters of man, and the emergence of the Nephilim, seems to be *part* of the reason why God brings judgment on the earth.<sup>6</sup>

While the Nephilim are important in understanding this story in Scripture, God’s *own* explanation for bringing about the Flood is often strangely overlooked. First, we are told that:

<sup>5</sup> The Lord saw that the wickedness of man was great in the earth, and that every intention of the thoughts of his heart was only evil continually. <sup>6</sup> And the Lord regretted that he had made man on the earth, and it grieved him to his heart. <sup>7</sup> So the Lord said, “I will blot out man whom I have created from the face of the land, man and animals and creeping things and birds of the heavens, for I am sorry that I have made them.” <sup>8</sup> But Noah found favor in the eyes of the Lord. (Gen. 6:5-8 ESV)

The text tells us how the ‘wickedness of man was great’ and ‘every intention of the thoughts of his heart was only evil continually’. The situation is so bad that God *actually* regrets having made the earth and decides to terminate his creation.<sup>7</sup> Shortly after the text explains *more specifically* what the sin of the antediluvian generation was:

Now the earth was corrupt in God's sight, and the earth was filled with violence. <sup>12</sup> And God saw the earth, and behold, it was corrupt, for all flesh had corrupted their way on the earth. <sup>13</sup> And God said to Noah, “I have determined to make an end of all flesh, for the earth is filled with violence through them. Behold, I will destroy them with the earth. (Gen. 6:11-13 ESV)

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<sup>2</sup> Mark 12:25; Biblehub.com, “International Standard Bible Encyclopedia, Antediluvians,” accessed 20 October, 2018, <http://biblehub.com/topical/a/antediluvians.htm>.

<sup>3</sup> The NIV Study Bible; Keil and Delitzsch’s Commentary goes into great depths on this topic: Biblehub.com, “Keil and Delitzsch OT Commentary, Genesis 9,” accessed 16 October, 2018, <https://biblehub.com/commentaries/kad/genesis/9.htm>.

<sup>4</sup> See also Heb. 11:7; Gen. 7:1.

<sup>5</sup> See also: Biblestudytools.com, “John Gill’s Exposition of the Bible, Genesis 6:2,” accessed 20 October, 2018, <https://www.biblestudytools.com/commentaries/gills-exposition-of-the-bible/genesis-6-2.html>.

<sup>6</sup> Matthew Henry in his commentary also understands it this way: Biblestudytools.com, “Matthew Henry Commentary on the Whole Bible, Genesis 6,” accessed 16 October, 2018, <https://www.biblestudytools.com/commentaries/matthew-henry-complete/genesis/6.html>; See also “John Gill’s commentary.”

<sup>7</sup> See also Nicholas T. Wright, *Evil and the Justice of God* (Downers Grove, IL: IVP Books, 2006), 15-16.

In these verses *twice* we are specifically informed that the main problem of the pre-Flood generation was *its violence*: first the text and then God himself underline how the earth was ‘filled with violence’. It is this violence — which the Nephilim no doubt participated in and championed — which is the cause of the Flood and which grieves God to the point of him desiring the end of his creation.

## 2. THE CONCESSION OF MEAT-EATING

After the Flood has destroyed all of humanity and the animal creation, apart from those within the ark, Noah offers sacrifices of clean animals to God. Much has been made of the words immediately after this, namely the fact that the writer of the text affirms ‘that the Lord smelled the pleasing aroma’ of the sacrifice, and yet this text is often interpreted out of its context. Firstly, it is *not automatically* God himself who is describing the sacrifice as a pleasing aroma, the text merely underlines that God smelled what the writer — or perhaps Noah and his family — describe as a pleasing aroma. If I were to write ‘Marcello saw the beautiful car’ it does not necessarily mean I consider the car beautiful, only that the writer of the phrase or the general culture considers it so. Either way, there is a strong element of accommodation and symbolism here. Other parts of scripture highlight how God does not desire sacrifice but accepted them as part of the limited and fallen culture of the time, and more importantly as symbols of Christ’s future sacrifice.<sup>8</sup> The trope of a ‘pleasing aroma to the Lord’ is found in other scriptures;<sup>9</sup> Keil and Delitzsch explain this passage, and the divine accommodation present in it, in their commentary:

He graciously accepted the feelings of the offerer which rose to Him in the odour of the sacrificial flame. In the sacrificial flame the essence of the animal was resolved into vapour; so that when man presented a sacrifice in his own stead, his inmost being, his spirit, and his heart ascended to God in the vapour, and the sacrifice brought the feeling of his heart before God. This feeling of gratitude for gracious protection, and of desire for further communications of grace, was well-pleasing to God.<sup>10</sup>

In the same way, Paul reinterprets this concept in terms of Christian service and Christ’s sacrifice: ‘I have received full payment, and more. I am well supplied, having received from Epaphroditus the gifts you sent, a fragrant offering, a sacrifice acceptable and pleasing to God’ (Philippians 4:18).<sup>11</sup> God was willing to accept the expression of faith and devotion of fallen and primitive peoples for a period, in view of the true sacrifice of Christ on the cross.

I argue that while God certainly accepts Noah’s faith in his sacrifice, the words immediately afterwards are in fact a *very harsh criticism of human beings* and their sinfulness, and set the stage for understanding the concession of meat-eating in the next verses. We are told very clearly: ‘I will never again curse the ground because of man, for the intention of man’s heart is evil from his youth. Neither will I ever again strike down every living creature as I have done. While the earth remains, seedtime and harvest, cold and heat, summer

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<sup>8</sup> Psa. 40:6-8, Heb. 10:1-14, Psa. 51:16, Isa. 1:11, Jer. 7:22-23, 1 Sam. 15:22.

<sup>9</sup> See Num. 15:3; Lev. 1:9.

<sup>10</sup> Biblehub.com. “Keil and Delitzsch OT Commentary, Genesis 8,” accessed 16 October, 2018, <https://biblehub.com/commentaries/kad/genesis/8.htm>, 8:20,

<sup>11</sup> See Eph. 5:2: ‘And walk in love, as Christ loved us and gave himself up for us, a fragrant offering and sacrifice to God’; See also 2 Cor. 2:15.

and winter, day and night, shall not cease' (Gen. 8:21-22, ESV). The NIV places a variant reading with 'even though': 'Never again will I curse the ground because of humans, even though every inclination of the human heart is evil from childhood' (Gen. 8:21 NIV). In either translation it indicates that God has seen the degree of humankind's sinfulness and hard-heartedness and is forced to compromise, at least temporarily until its condition had improved, in order to continue with his creation and not end it definitively. Most commentators seem to ignore the link between the violence of Gen. 6:12, 'the earth was filled with violence', with the concessions to, and regulation of violence, of Genesis 9. The concession to eat meat in this sense appears here as a *reluctant concession* of God who sees that in order to allow creation to continue he must lower his standards temporarily;<sup>12</sup> this makes sense in the light of Paul's statement that where there is no law there is no transgression (Rom. 4:15, 5:13). Of course the law of conscience remained as the basic benchmark for human behaviour, but conscience can also be shaped by culture and as time progressed God's original ideal would be lost and meat-eating would become part of the normal landscape of human life. Despite this, the echoes of this ideal can be heard throughout cultures across the globe.

The language used to describe God's giving of animals to the post-diluvian generation appears to be *concessional* and based on the very low spiritual and moral condition humanity had sunken to. Richard Bauckham underlines how:

The account has to be read against the background of the way Genesis 1 portrays humans and animals as originally vegetarian. God gave them only plants for food (Gen. 1:29-30). In view of the change that is recognised after the Flood (Gen. 9:2-3,5-6), we are probably to understand that the violence that led to the Flood included killing for food.<sup>13</sup>

Again, Richard Bauckham describes Genesis 9 as a sort of 'holding operation' until humanity had regained a greater spiritual condition:

Finally, we should notice that the renewal of the creation mandate to humanity in Genesis 9:1-7 not only indicates a kind of fresh start to creation after the Flood, re-establishing God's creative will for humanity on earth in relation to the animals, but also expresses this creative will in terms conditioned by the violence which is now a feature of human life. Since God now pledges himself to the survival of human and animal life in spite of this violence, the creation mandate is reformulated to take account of it. Violence must be contained so it does not endanger human survival. A limited degree of violence now enters the notion of human dominion over the animals (9:2-5), but only in the interests of human survival. Similarly, the violence of man against man is to be restrained by God's permission for limited retaliation (9:6), so that murder should not lead to the unlimited violence of blood-feud, which always in ancient society threatened to go on forever. Thus God now permits such limited violence as will enable humanity to multiply and populate the earth (9:1,7) in the face of both animal and internecine violence. With biblical hindsight, of course, we can recognize in this a kind of holding operation, with a view to God's redemptive strategy for the transformation of human hearts.<sup>14</sup>

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<sup>12</sup> See also Abraham Isaac Kook's rabbinical Jewish perspective on this passage: "D. Cohen, ed., Rabbi Abraham Kook: A Vision of Vegetarianism and Peace," accessed 17 October, 2018, <https://www.jewishveg.org/AVisionofVegetarianismandPeace.pdf>.

<sup>13</sup> Richard Bauckham, *Bible and Ecology: Rediscovering the Community of Creation* (Exeter: Dartmon, Longman and Todd Ltd, 2010), 23.

<sup>14</sup> Richard Bauckham, *The Bible in Politics: How to Read the Bible Politically*, 2nd ed. (London: SPCK, 2010), 134-136.

We can see how the violence denounced by God in Genesis 6 is then regulated to a certain degree in Genesis 9:1-6:

And God blessed Noah and his sons and said to them, “Be fruitful and multiply and fill the earth. <sup>2</sup>The fear of you and the dread of you shall be upon every beast of the earth and upon every bird of the heavens, upon everything that creeps on the ground and all the fish of the sea. Into your hand they are delivered. <sup>3</sup>Every moving thing that lives shall be food for you. And as I gave you the green plants, I give you everything. <sup>4</sup>But you shall not eat flesh with its life, that is, its blood.<sup>5</sup>And for your lifeblood I will require a reckoning: from every beast I will require it and from man. From his fellow man I will require a reckoning for the life of man.

<sup>6</sup>“Whoever sheds the blood of man,  
by man shall his blood be shed,  
for God made man in his own image.

In these verses God seeks to *regulate* and *restrain* human violence; meat is given only with the caveat of not eating blood, whereas the murder of humans would now be punished with the death of the perpetrator, thus *limiting* the possibility of endless feuds of retaliation and discouraging lawlessness. We see the beginning of this kind of cyclical violence in Genesis 4:23-24 where God’s mercy towards Cain and his promise to protect him from retaliation is expanded almost indefinitely by Lamech — the first man recorded to have married two women — into a law of endless blood-feud. The severity of the death penalty for murder should make us reflect on how greatly the situation had degenerated and may have been a form of ‘martial law’ implemented to restore order. This does not appear to be God’s desired way of dealing with human beings, but more like God being compelled to take radical measures in order to put back together a situation which had spiralled out of control. For now God is forced to let humankind have its way and can only limit and contain man’s evil and violence if he is to continue walking with it: ‘Hence God after the Flood (8:21) observes that the inclination of the human heart is evil, just as he had done before the Flood (6:5), but whereas before the Flood this was the ground for destroying humanity, after the Flood it is a situation that God tolerates. In spite of human evil, God resolves never again to destroy humanity (8:21)’.<sup>15</sup>

The Noahic covenant that follows is one of *pure* grace and mercy, God’s promise to not destroy the earth again is based entirely on his incredible patience and benevolence.<sup>16</sup> But the Noahic covenant is not only with human beings but also with all creatures to whom God promises that he will never again flood the earth and of which the rainbow is a sign: ‘And God said, “This is the sign of the covenant I am making between me and you and every living creature with you, a covenant for all generations to come: I have set my rainbow in the clouds, and it will be the sign of the covenant between me and the earth’ (Gen. 9:12-13).<sup>17</sup> This is repeated various times at the beginning of the chapter (Gen. 9:10, 12, 15, 16), as in verse 15: ‘So God said to Noah, “This is the sign of the covenant I have established between me and all life on the earth”’. God is clearly concerned with the entire created order not only human beings.

God’s prohibition on not consuming blood in this context can be seen as a form of respect towards these creatures and to himself, their Creator, and in particular underlines the truth that their lives in fact

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<sup>15</sup> Bauckham, *The Bible in Politics*, 135.

<sup>16</sup> Bauckham, *The Bible in Politics*, 135.

<sup>17</sup> Bauckham, *The Bible in Politics*, 136.

belong to God. Not consuming blood also highlights the fact that humans should be deriving their life from God and not from the flesh of animals, which was an idea often present in various forms of animism, where the ‘life-force’ of creatures is sometimes thought to be assimilated by the ingestion of the animal’s body.<sup>18</sup> According to Jewish tradition a further explanation may be warranted and that is that one of the sins of the antediluvian generation was their extreme cruelty towards animals, which consisted not only in eating them without God’s permission but also in eating the body parts of living animals.<sup>19</sup> According to this understanding of the text the wicked people of the pre-Flood era began amputating the limbs of animals while keeping them alive as a way of keeping the rest of the meat fresh. Eating meat without blood meant that the animal had to be killed and its blood drained before it could be eaten, and the ghoulish cruelty of the antediluvians would be stopped.<sup>20</sup> This is reflected in the so-called Noahide laws within Jewish tradition, which teach that in order for gentiles to be considered righteous seven laws must be adhered to; these include refraining from idolatry, sexual immorality, murder, robbery, blasphemy, the necessity of creating a system of laws, and finally not eating flesh from a living animal.<sup>21</sup>

### 3. VIOLENCE AND SHALOM

While God does accommodate to human weakness and at times allows limited forms of violence, his heart is always for non-violence and his ideal of *shalom* represented in the first two chapters of Genesis, and prophesied in Isaiah and Revelation.<sup>22</sup> In this sense, God is opposed to *unnecessary* violence, which he considers evil. We see numerous examples of this in the Psalms and many other scriptures where wickedness and violence are used *interchangeably; the wicked are normally also violent:*

who sets me free from my enemies. You exalted me above my foes; from a violent man you rescued me. (2 Sam. 22:49, NIV)

You destroy those who tell lies; the LORD abhors the man of bloodshed and deceit. (Psa. 5:6, ESV)

The LORD tests the righteous, but his soul hates the wicked and the one who loves violence (Psa. 11:5, ESV)

who rescued me from my enemies; yes, you exalted me above those who rose against me; you delivered me from the man of violence (Psa. 18:48, ESV).

Do not take my soul away with sinners, or my life with men of bloodshed, (Psa. 26:9 ESV)

deliver me from those who work evil, and save me from bloodthirsty men (Psa. 59:2 ESV)

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<sup>18</sup> For example in the cult of Mithra and other mystery religions, but also in various primitive hunter-gatherer cultures.

<sup>19</sup> Biblehub.com, “Keil and Delitzsch OT Commentary, Genesis 9,” accessed 16 October, 2018, <https://biblehub.com/commentaries/kad/genesis/9.htm>, 9:3,

<sup>20</sup> Biblestudytools.com, “Commentary Critical and Explanatory on the Whole Bible, Genesis 9,” accessed 16 October, 2018, <https://www.biblestudytools.com/commentaries/jamieson-fausset-brown/genesis/genesis-9.html>.

<sup>21</sup> Myjewishlearning.com, “The Noahide Laws,” accessed 25 October, 2018, <https://www.myjewishlearning.com/article/the-noahide-laws/>.

<sup>22</sup> Isa. 11:6-9; Rev. chapters 21-22.

From oppression and violence he redeems their life, and precious is their blood in his sight. (Psa. 72:14  
ESV)

Therefore pride is their necklace; violence covers them as a garment. (Psa. 73:6 ESV)

Have regard for the covenant, for the dark places of the land are full of the habitations of violence.  
(Psa. 74:20 ESV)

O that You would slay the wicked, O God; Depart from me, therefore, men of bloodshed. (Psa. 139:19  
ESV)

Deliver me, O LORD, from evil men; preserve me from violent men (Psa. 140:1 ESV)

Do not envy a man of violence and do not choose any of his ways (Prov. 3:31 ESV)

For they eat the bread of wickedness and drink the wine of violence. (Prov. 4:17 ESV)

The mouth of the righteous is a fountain of life,  
but the mouth of the wicked conceals violence.  
(Prov. 10:11, ESV)

From the fruit of his mouth a man eats what is good, but the desire of the treacherous is for violence.  
(Prov. 13:2, ESV)

Bloodthirsty men hate one who is blameless and seek the life of the upright (Prov. 29:10, ESV)

Their cobwebs are useless for clothing; they cannot cover themselves with what they make. Their deeds  
are evil deeds, and acts of violence are in their hands. (Isa. 59:6, NIV)

Their feet rush into sin; they are swift to shed innocent blood. They pursue evil schemes; acts  
of violence mark their ways. (Isa. 59:7, NIV)

No longer will violence be heard in your land, nor ruin or destruction within your borders, but you will  
call your walls Salvation and your gates Praise. (Isa. 60:18, NIV)

O Lord, how long shall I cry for help, and you will not hear? Or cry to you "Violence!" and you will not  
save? Why do you make me see iniquity, and why do you idly look at wrong? Destruction and violence  
are before me; strife and contention arise. So the law is paralyzed, and justice never goes forth. For the  
wicked surround the righteous; so justice goes forth perverted (Hab. 1:1-4, ESV).

The violence you have done to Lebanon will overwhelm you, and your destruction of animals will  
terrify you. For you have shed human blood; you have destroyed lands and cities and everyone in them.  
(Hab. 2:17, NIV)

"Suppose he has a violent son, who sheds blood or does any of these other things"

(Ezek. 18:10, NIV)

therefore as surely as I live, declares the Sovereign Lord, I will give you over to bloodshed and it will pursue you. Since you did not hate bloodshed, bloodshed will pursue you.

(Ezek. 35:6, NIV)

Your rich people are violent; your inhabitants are liars and their tongues speak deceitfully.

(Mic. 6:12, NIV)

There is only cursing, lying and murder, stealing and adultery; they break all bounds, and bloodshed follows bloodshed.

(Hos. 4:2, NIV)

“Though I cry, ‘Violence!’ I get no response; though I call for help, there is no justice.

(Job 19:7, NIV)

It’s important to note that when talking about the shedding of blood the context is essential. At the same time, the concept of ‘violence’ and ‘bloodshed’ often refers generally to both humans and animals, and either way denotes an overall disposition towards violence. This can be seen clearly from the book of Ezekiel where in talking about bloodshed and judgment *both* humans and animals perish; and in the verses just cited from Habakkuk where God condemns violence and then talks about the destruction of animals:

‘Or if I send a plague into that land and pour out my wrath on it through bloodshed, killing its people and their animals’ (Ezek. 14:19, NIV).

The violence you have done to Lebanon will overwhelm you, and your destruction of animals will terrify you. For you have shed human blood; you have destroyed lands and cities and everyone in them.

(Hab. 2:17, NIV)

#### **4. GENESIS 9 WITHIN THE GREATER BIBLE STORY**

The story of the Flood is foundational to understanding how meat-eating is viewed in the following books of Scripture. These chapters help to explain the ‘why’ of meat-eating and killing of animals for food within Israel. In this sense, Genesis chapters 6-9 are in fact crucial in understanding how meat-eating came to be within the Old Testament and ultimately in Jesus’ time. No doubt, *later* other reasons for meat-eating arose, such as necessity because of a lack of food in certain areas and situations, or simply because it became a part of the culture and was normalised. This is to say that meat-eating became a cultural norm and was no longer *necessarily* based on hard-heartedness or rebellion as it had been originally, but was simply inherited from the surrounding culture as part and parcel of human existence. This may have been one of the reasons Jesus was willing to interact with it in his time.<sup>23</sup> Nevertheless, even after the Flood, in Deuteronomy for

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<sup>23</sup> But see Matt. 19:8. for how Jesus considered Genesis chapters 1 and 2 the ideal for creation.



example, meat-eating is still clearly described as a reluctant concession to human beings. Notice how these two passages in Deuteronomy closely mirror each other:

When the Lord your God has enlarged your territory as he promised you, and you crave meat and say, “I would like some meat,” then you may eat as much of it as you want. (Deut. 12:20).

When you enter the land the Lord your God is giving you and have taken possession of it and settled in it, and you say, “Let us set a king over us like all the nations around us,” be sure to appoint over you a king the Lord your God chooses. (Deut. 17:14-15).

And now relate them to how the Lord considered Israel’s request to have a King:

So all the elders of Israel gathered together and came to Samuel at Ramah. They said to him, “You are old, and your sons do not follow your ways; now appoint a king to lead us, such as all the other nations have.”

But when they said, “Give us a king to lead us,” this displeased Samuel; so he prayed to the Lord. And the Lord told him: “Listen to all that the people are saying to you; it is not you they have rejected, but they have rejected me as their king. As they have done from the day I brought them up out of Egypt until this day, forsaking me and serving other gods, so they are doing to you. Now listen to them; but warn them solemnly and let them know what the king who will reign over them will claim as his rights.”<sup>24</sup>

Jesus was born into and had to interact with this fallen culture. In this sense, using the Jewish, or Roman, culture Jesus lived within as some kind of endorsement for meat-eating misunderstands the direction of Scripture and God’s hope for all creation. The first century should be viewed simply as God’s entry point into human history through the incarnation and part of Jesus’ mission as being one who was ‘born under the Law’ (Gal. 4:4). No doubt God chose a particular context and time, Israel and the Roman Empire, for various reasons, but this does not imply in any way that the cultures of these nations represent God’s ideal or future goal, no more than the presence of slavery at the time of Christ should be sacralised because it existed at this time.<sup>25</sup>

## 5. AS IT WAS IN THE DAYS OF NOAH

In commenting on the end times Jesus specifically mentions Noah and the Flood as an example of the conditions there will be at the end of the age:

For as were the days of Noah, so will be the coming of the Son of Man. For as in those days before the flood they were eating and drinking, marrying and giving in marriage, until the day when Noah entered the ark,<sup>39</sup> and they were unaware until the flood came and swept them all away, so will be the coming of the Son of Man. (Matt. 24:37-39)

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<sup>24</sup> 1 Sam. 8:4-8.

<sup>25</sup> See also Manfred T. Brauch, *Abusing Scripture* (Downers Grove, IL: IVP Academic, 2009), 225-249.

Just as it was in the days of Noah, so will it be in the days of the Son of Man. They were eating and drinking and marrying and being given in marriage, until the day when Noah entered the ark, and the flood came and destroyed them all. (Luke 17:27).

While Jesus' main emphasis seems to be on the unconcerned and self-serving lifestyle of the antediluvians, it is interesting to note that their excessive desire for food and drink also appears to be chastised. Paul denounces something similar in Philippians 3:19: 'Their end is destruction, their god is their belly, and they glory in their shame, with minds set on earthly things'. When read in light of God's denunciation of violence as being the core sin behind the Flood, and the concession to eat meat after it, *it is not entirely impossible* to believe that the antediluvians' violent and self-serving food choices were one of the reasons for their condemnation. Likewise, Jesus' mention of marriage seems to fit perfectly God's condemnation of the mixing of the sons of God and the daughters of men which we analysed earlier. It appears that sex and food may have become such idols for the pre-Flood generation that they were willing to break God's laws in order to reach them; this may have meant, on the one hand, violating God's original food law,<sup>26</sup> which was still in place, and on the other intermarrying with the evil and unbelieving women of the line of Cain. Paul in his last letter also alluded to the conditions which will characterise the last days and therefore — according to Jesus — resembled to a certain degree the generation before the Flood:

But understand this, that in the last days there will come times of difficulty. <sup>2</sup>For people will be lovers of self, lovers of money, proud, arrogant, abusive, disobedient to their parents, ungrateful, unholy, <sup>3</sup>heartless, unappeasable, slanderous, without self-control, brutal, not loving good, <sup>4</sup>treacherous, reckless, swollen with conceit, lovers of pleasure rather than lovers of God, <sup>5</sup>having the appearance of godliness, but denying its power (2 Tim. 3:1-5, ESV).

We are told how these people, like the antediluvians of old, are 'brutal' or fierce, ἀνήμερος *anemeros*, perhaps in reference to their violent nature, and how they put pleasure above God. Paul, likewise, spoke about how he had been freed from his former 'violent' way of life which had been in opposition to God: 'Even though I was once a blasphemer and a persecutor and a violent man, I was shown mercy because I acted in ignorance and unbelief' (1 Tim. 1:13, NIV).

## 6. CONCLUSIONS

In this essay I attempted to analyse the Flood narrative and in particular the concession to eat meat given in Genesis 9 within its greater context. I sought to show how the permission for meat-eating in Genesis 9 is given as a *reluctant concession* after the Flood and only after God's underlining of the deep sinfulness of the human heart. I also sought to show how the violence in Genesis 6 which led to the judgment of the world is linked to God's later attempt to *limit and regulate violence*. It is not casual that immediately after the Flood God proceeds to regulate both murder and meat-eating, which reflect two of the *different* forms of violence that had infected the antediluvian world. God is forced to lower his standards if he desires to continue to

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<sup>26</sup> Delitzsche and Keil also underline the violation of God's original food law: "Delitzsche and Keil OT Commentary," Genesis 9:3.

dwell with his creation and not terminate it permanently; the outcome is what Bauckham defines a 'holding operation' which takes into account the particularly low level humanity had sunken to before the Flood. It is only because of God's grace and mercy that creation is allowed to continue. Furthermore, I sought to show how meat-eating within later biblical texts, and within Israel, must be interpreted through the Flood story and the rationale behind God's *initial* concession. It is the hermeneutical key to understanding how God's original food law was, at least temporarily, abandoned.

While a superficial reading of the text creates profound contradictions in the character of God, a more in-depth analysis helps to shed light on its meaning. In conclusion, far from being a proof-text *for* violence against animals, Genesis chapters 6-9 *highlight* the amazing depths of God's love, grace, and patience in the face of human violence, rebellion, and hardheartedness; a love which would be fully brought to the light only hundreds of years later, in the event of the cross.

**DIAGRAM OF GENESIS 6-9**

**A CORRUPT EARTH**

‘The Lord saw that the wickedness of man was great in the earth’

(Gen. 6:5)

‘The earth was filled with violence’.

(Gen. 6:12)



**JUDGMENT OF THE EARTH**

‘For forty days the flood kept coming on the earth, and as the waters increased they lifted the ark high above the earth’.

(Gen. 7:17)



**RECOGNITION OF THE CONTINUED EVIL IN THE HUMAN HEART**

‘even though every inclination of the human heart is evil from childhood’.

(Gen. 8:21)



**REGULATION/LIMITATION OF VIOLENCE**

(Gen. 9:1-6)



**1. VIOLENCE AGAINST HUMANS**

‘Whoever sheds human blood,  
by humans shall their blood be shed’.

(Gen. 9:6)

**2. VIOLENCE AGAINST ANIMALS**

Gen. 9:3-4 ‘Just as I gave you the  
green plants, I now give you everything.

But you shall not eat flesh with its life, that is, its blood’.



**NOAHIC COVENANT OF GRACE**

‘This is the sign of the covenant I am making between me and you and every living creature with you, a covenant for all generations to come: I have set my rainbow in the clouds, and it will be the sign of the covenant between me and the earth’.

(Gen. 9:12-13)

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