

Sacred Space in Promise – The Pre-Patriarchal Period

I. The Flood and Noahic Covenant

1. Genesis traces a decline following the banishment from Eden: *Cain → Lamech → Gen. 6.*
2. Man as *flawed image* was filling the earth (cf. 6:1, 5 with 1:28), so that God determined to bring forth a “new creation” – *a purging of creation through a human deliverer.* * 5:28-29
3. The Flood presupposed God’s promise in Eden, but also built on it, revealing that His intent was *creational renewal* – and so *human renewal*, not simply triumph over opposition.
 - a. The creational significance of the Flood is the reason for the text’s *universal* language.
 - b. At the same time, Noah’s name and its significance indicated the *non-ultimacy* of this work of “new creation” – *Noah would be the agent of relief and comfort **within** the curse.*
4. The text notably emphasizes Noah’s *righteousness*, which must be interpreted within the narrative and its purpose and significance. * cf. 6:8-9 with 5:29, 6:5, 7:1
 - a. This righteousness doesn’t imply *sinlessness*, but ***uniqueness*** – Noah as *authentic* man.
 - b. Noah’s righteousness, and so his election, have a typological significance: *He was a new Adam and source of deliverance from death, and so a prototype of the promised “seed.”*
5. Thus the Flood advanced God’s disclosure of His re-creational intent, *but didn’t fulfill it.*
 - a. This is evident in the *continuance of sin and the curse* after the Flood. * 8:21, 9:1-6
 - b. So it is evident in the fact that *sacred space had not been restored.*

*Noah departed the ark and entered into the renewed earth only to immediately build an **altar**. God’s new Adam had not led mankind back into the garden-sanctuary.* * 8:18-22

6. The narrative introduced the concept of offerings presented at a sacred site immediately after the Fall in Eden to show how estrangement had profoundly affected man’s worship of God.

It similarly introduces the concept of altars immediately after the Flood, underscoring that this purging and renewal hadn’t remedied the fundamental problem of human estrangement.

Sacred space – the realm of divine-human encounter – continued to be a temporal and symbolic phenomenon, and from this point forward altars will play a central role in man’s interaction with God.

7. The Flood’s significance is disclosed in the *Noahic Covenant* and its specifics. * 6:18, 9:8ff
 - a. By it, God set Noah apart as the agent of His judgment, deliverance, and purging, and the source of a new human race as His new Adam. * ref. 6:17-20

Thus the Noahic Covenant identified the Flood as the renewal of creation. * ref. 8:17

- b. So it bound the renewed creation to God with the promise of its perpetuity and blessing.

II. The Tower of Babel

After recording God's new creational covenant with man and the earth (9:8-17), the Genesis account immediately lists a number of people groups descended from Noah, introducing the concept of *nations* (10:1-32). * *Note that this list reflects Israelite categories and concerns.*

1. Noah's descendents were greatly multiplying in the earth, *and yet this multitude remained one people united by a common language and culture* (11:1).
 - a. Genesis 10, then, is anachronistic, and recounts the outcome of 11:1-9. *The Babel episode explains how Noah's descendents, through his three sons, came to be separate nations distinguished by language, culture and geographical boundaries.* * cf. 10:1, 32
 - b. But mankind remained a unified people in the period immediately following the Flood, *and this solidarity provides the human context for what transpired at Babel.*
2. The Fall didn't eradicate the image of God in man, for man **is** image-bearer. *So the human compulsion to encounter God continued, but now in the context of alienation and autonomy.*
3. The account of Babel expresses this dynamic, but at the level of the **human race**. *Noah had brought relief in the midst of the curse, but neither he nor the flood had eliminated it.*
 - a. The city and its sacred ziggurat ("tower") signified mankind's attempt to resolve its exile from God's garden by constructing a new dwelling-sanctuary for unified human rule – *a new shalomic "Eden" from which mankind, in harmonious solidarity, could manifest and exercise human dominion as **independent and self-reliant**.*
 - b. So the tower "into heaven" represented man's unified effort to make provision for God to return to them and dwell with them in the new city-sanctuary they had constructed.
 - c. God did "come down" to them as they intended by their ziggurat, but to *overthrow* their designs, not fulfill them. * 11:5-9

He would continue to interact with His estranged image-bearers, but on His own terms, and according to His own initiative and designs, not theirs.

4. At bottom, the Babel episode represents exiled mankind's attempt to **restore sacred space**, and so "make a name" for themselves *in contradistinction to God making a name for man in accordance with His own purposes and pledge in Eden.* * cf. 11:4 with 9:24-27
 - a. God would make a name for man by having His image-son fill the earth with His presence and wise, loving rule. *Babel was man seeking to make a name for himself as man – by means of human solidarity and glory working against God's designs.*
 - b. Cain's offering was the prototype of pseudo-worship that seeks to draw God near out of self-interest. *His effort failed, and now mankind had attempted the same thing, only to realize the same outcome of anti-shalom in scattering, disunity and disorder. **Far from recovering sacred space, human solidarity only further dismantled it.***

*But God would accomplish what mankind could not, restoring creational shalom in and through His chosen Man. **This One would bring a new unity to mankind – not of the natural sorts that humans envision and aspire to, but ontological unity in the Spirit.***