

The Drag of Depravity

(Genesis 4:1-16; 6:1-8; 8:18-22; 9:12-17; 11:1-9)

Are We Really That Bad?

Depravity is a word theologians use to describe mankind's present propensity for sin. The word actually comes from the Latin word *depravo*, which means "to make crooked, to distort, or to disfigure." The concept of human depravity is not popular nowadays, yet it is the clear teaching of Scripture. "Total depravity" does not mean that we are as bad as we can be or that there is nothing good in fallen mankind. The image of God in us is marred, but has not been obliterated. All we mean by "*total*/depravity" is that no part of our being is unaffected by the fall. So there is no residue of good within us that is able to offset the bad, thereby inclining God to accept us as we are. This is *so* important!

There is a vague, but general, impression that life is like an examination. If we choose to go with our "good" side rather than our "bad" side, we make the grade. If we exercise our free will in the opposite direction, we flunk the exam. To add to this inaccurate picture, it is assumed that God marks the exam using the Ogive curve; in other words, he takes the general average into account and adjusts our marks upward or downward depending on how others have done. So, if I am relatively good--good in relation to others--I make the cut (to use a golf analogy). This not only misunderstands the nature of our depravity, but also undercuts the Bible's clear teaching on God's grace.

It's not difficult to see how everything hangs together. If our view of humanity is faulty, we are almost inevitably going to have a defective view of the grace of God. If we think God's primary concern is that we keep the laws that he established arbitrarily, we turn him into a cosmic policeman. If we think we can pull ourselves up by our bootstraps (because we have it within ourselves to be relatively good), or that we simply need a little help (either by someone's example or by an incentive or a little helpful empowerment), we end up tampering with God's *whole* revelation! So let's look at developments at the dawn of human history.

Our Inability to Live in Harmony (Cain and Abel)

- ❖ Both Cain and Abel "had religion." Why do you think God looked with favor on Abel's offering and with disfavor on Cain's offering?
- ❖ What do you think of Cain's reply to God when God inquired concerning his brother's whereabouts?
- ❖ What is the significance of the mark God placed on Cain for his protection?
- ❖ Where did Cain get his wife?

Karl Barth has an interesting comment:

The problem with religious man is that he does not believe. If he believed he would listen, but in religion he speaks; if he believed he would accept a gift, but in his religion he takes something for himself; if he believed he would let God intercede for God, but in his religion he ventures to grasp at God. Since it is such a grasping, religion is a contradiction of revelation; it is the concentrated expression of human unbelief. It is a feeble but defiant, an arrogant but hopeless attempt. In his religion man bolts and bars himself against revelation by fabricating a substitute. The result is nothing but a fiction, an anti-God who has entirely nothing to do with the true God.

When the Situation Calls for Drastic Action (The Flood)

- ❖ What was the illicit intermarriage of which we read in the first few verses of Genesis 6?

There are three theories that are unsatisfactory:

1. The descendants of Seth

Although this interpretation has been the traditional one since the third century, it is not the most natural way to read the passage. One cannot arbitrarily limit the terms “men” and “daughters” to the line of Cain.

2. Angels

From the text itself, the idea that angels cohabited with women is possible. Some have seen 1 Pet 3:19-20 and Jude 6-7 as referring to this illicit angelic action. But how could this have happened? Jesus said explicitly that angels do not marry ((Mark 12:25). In any event, the offenders here are described as ‘mortal’, not angels (Gen 6:3).

3. Royal tyrants

The “sons of God” were sons of Lamech who claimed deity for themselves and established royal harems and producing the Nephilim-heroes.

Bruce Waltke suggests a view that combines the first and third options. In other words, the tyrants were demon possessed. So corrupt were they that their perverted psyches allowed this entrance of the demonic.¹

- ❖ Respond to the statement: “The universal flood did not cover the entire earth.”

In this connection, you may well be aware of the fact that there has been considerable debate over the extent of the flood. It is interesting that people of different cultures have traditions concerning a massive flood. There is also evidence of a huge flood, covering a large area in the Tigris-Euphrates region.

¹Bruce K. Waltke, *Genesis: A Commentary* (Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 2001), 117.

John Whitcomb, Jr. argues that the flood was universal in the Zondervan Pictorial Bible Dictionary. His main arguments are:

1. All the high mountains under the whole heaven were covered (Gen 7:19) and water must seek its own level.
2. The waters of the deluge did not subside for over a year.
3. The Scriptures speak of the fountains of the great deep breaking up. Since this includes the ocean depths, the flood had to be universal in scale.
4. The ark was far too large to be required for a local flood.
5. If the flood had been a local event there would have been no need for an ark at all.
6. Only a universal flood can fit the description given by Peter (2 Pet 3:3-7).
7. The Bible teaches that all those outside the ark were destroyed (Matt 24:37-39).

I have included two handouts, one from a book which Whitcomb co-authored, and another from a book by Hugh Ross (who favors a flood that is local in extent but universal in its effect on mankind).² For what it's worth, I find Whitcomb's arguments unconvincing. It contains a few *non sequiturs*. I do not believe that the flood had to cover the entire earth for it to have achieved its objective.

We'll Do It Our Way (Babel)

- ❖ What was really going on at Babel?

Some have argued that some kind of occultism was in view since the tower was to be, literally, "with the heavens." In other words, some form of false religion involving the signs of the zodiac, was involved. This is possible but not necessary.

It is nevertheless interesting that Babel depicts human civilization in opposition to God and this is as evident in religion as much as (perhaps more than) anywhere else.

²John C. Whitcomb Jr., and Henry M. Morris, *The Genesis Flood: The Biblical Record and its Scientific Implications* (Grand Rapids: Baker Book House, 1961). Hugh Ross, *The Genesis Question: Scientific Advances and the Accuracy of Genesis* (Colorado Springs: NavPress, 2001).