

NOAH: PROPHET, PRIEST & KING

A Meditation on Genesis 8:20-9:7

I'd like us to look at Noah, and especially how he fulfills the roles of prophet, priest and king.

First, Noah was a prophet. A prophet is always one who proclaims the Word of the Lord, and who sometimes predicts the future. Noah was a prophet in both senses. Genesis doesn't lay much stress on his "prophet ministry," but 2 Peter 2:5 calls him a "herald of righteousness." The prophet's vocation is not to tickle ears or pat backs or shake hands, but to call people to holiness, which requires repentance and obedience. Warren Wiersbe has observed that "there are not many prophets today. The church is indeed a non-prophet organization." It's a sad commentary on the modern evangelical church. Many pastors of our biggest churches flat out admit that they don't address sin. They're deluded into thinking that God wants them to help people feel better about themselves, but this can't take place until we've adequately dealt with the sin in our lives. Listen to the LORD's instructions to Isaiah, who was a real prophet. "Cry aloud; do not hold back; lift up your voice like a trumpet; declare to my people their transgression, to the house of Jacob their sins" (Isa. 58:1). This is what a prophet does, and this is what Noah did.

Noah also predicted the future in two different ways. The first way is obvious: He predicted the coming world-wide judgment of God. The second way is not so obvious: His very name predicted the coming rest for the people of God. To see this we need to back up to Genesis 5:28-29: "When Lamech had lived 182 years, he fathered a son and called his name Noah (which in Hebrew means *rest*), saying, 'Out of the ground that the LORD has cursed this one shall bring us relief from our work and from the painful toil of our hands.'" This is how I picture the scene: Lamech was a righteous man, in a world of hundreds of thousands, perhaps millions, of wicked people, when few righteous men could be found. And I imagine godly Lamech calling out to God for deliverance from the corruption that surrounded him on every side. Then one day God answered his prayers and said, "Lamech, you're going to have a son, and I want you to name him Noah, which means rest, because he will bring rest to the world. Thus, every time you say 'Noah, Rest,' you will be reminded of my promise to bring rest to the world."

Now the difficulty in the passage is that Lamech names him Noah, but then says, "Out of the ground that the LORD has cursed this one shall bring us relief from our work and from the painful toil of our hands" (5:29). Did Noah remove the curse? No. So what happened? It seems that Lamech read into God's promise about rest, and assumed that Genesis 3:15 was going to be fulfilled in his son. In short, Lamech thought Noah was going to be Jesus, who would deliver the people from the curse and usher in the ultimate rest. However, while Noah certainly didn't inaugurate the final rest, he did bring relief from the enemies of God. Interestingly, after the flood waters subsided, we're told that "the ark came to rest on the mountains of Ararat" (8:4). Many commentators think this rest is symbolic as well as physical; finally it is at rest from the ungodly, who were destroyed in the flood. Thus Noah's very name was prophetic, even if the prophecy was a bit cryptic.

Second, Noah was a priest. As soon as Noah got out of the ark he built an altar and offered sacrifices to the LORD (8:20-22). I believe these sacrifices represented at least three things. First, they were a thank offering for deliverance from the flood. "The greatest wonder of Genesis 8," notes James M. Boice, "is not that God remembered Noah, but that Noah remembered God." Second, these offerings were for the sin of Noah and his family. Like Job, Noah was the family priest who interceded on behalf of the whole family. Noah and his family were saved not because of their good works, but because of faith in the atonement of the sacrifices. Finally, these offerings symbolized Noah offering himself to God. The animals were offered in place of the people as a substitute, and they represented the people sacrificially offering themselves to God. Romans 12:1 picks up on this application for us today: "I appeal to you therefore, brothers, by the mercies of God, to present your bodies as a living sacrifice, holy and acceptable to God, which is your spiritual worship."

There is another parallel to these offerings that we don't want to miss, namely that of the pleasing aroma (Gen. 8:21). Our sacrificial lives also exude an aroma. "For we are the aroma of Christ to God among those who are being saved and among those who are perishing, to one a fragrance from death to death, to the other a fragrance from life to life" (2 Cor. 2:15-16).

Third, Noah was a king. He was given authority over God's creation, which included the animals that could now be enjoyed as food, as long as they removed the blood (Gen. 9:3), and murderers that had to be executed (vv. 5-6). Capital punishment is introduced here, and this may well be the first form of human

government instituted. Earlier when Cain killed Abel, God forbade anyone from seeking vengeance—that was not man’s prerogative. Now all that changes; now man has the responsibility and the God-given authority—in government—to execute murderers.

The question that begs to be answered is whether or not capital punishment is still applicable for our day. The beginning point is the original reason for *why* God gave the command in the first place. The reason is plain: “for God made man *in his own image*” (vs. 6). Capital punishment is based upon God’s image that is stamped upon every human being. Thus, we should recognize that murder is nothing less than an attack upon God Himself, and such cosmic violence can’t be tolerated. The applications that flow from man as God’s image bearer are legion, but consider one that James makes. Speaking of the tongue, James writes, “With it we bless our Lord and Father, and with it we curse people who are made in the likeness of God. From the same mouth come blessing and cursing. My brothers, these things ought not to be so” (Jam. 3:9-10). As soon as we lose sight of man as God’s image bearer, cursings and killings will escalate, without any need to bring about justice. After all, what makes killing a man any more significant than killing a dog? In fact, killing a dog may provoke greater outrage.

When we come to the New Testament, the apostle Paul states that we are to “be subject to the governing authorities. For there is no authority except from God, and those that exist have been instituted by God” (Rom. 13:1). He goes on to say that the government “does not bear the sword in vain” (vs. 4). Specifically, it bears the sword, in order to carry out God’s wrath on the wrongdoer. We can go on and on about those who have been falsely executed. Granted...but that still doesn’t negate the authority or responsibility of the government to appropriately and biblically fulfill their God-given role.

I hope when we point out that Noah is a type of Christ it’s obvious, because you’re looking at the Scriptures Christo-centrally. Jesus is of course the supreme prophet, priest and king. The author of Hebrews wrote, “Long ago, at many times and in many ways, God spoke to our fathers by the prophets, but in these last days he has spoken to us by his Son” (Heb. 1:1-2a). Jesus is the final prophet, the prophet *par excellence*, who has given us the last word, so that no other word is needed or necessary. Next, in Jesus the priesthood comes to an end, as Jesus is a priest forever after the order of Melchizedek, who not only offered a sacrifice for sins, but was the sacrifice for sins, so that “by a single offering he has perfected for all time those who are being sanctified” (Heb. 10:14). Lastly, Jesus is the king, who rose from the dead and then ascended to heaven and took His seat at the right hand of God the Father, “far above all rule and authority and power and dominion, and above every name that is named, not only in this age but also in the one to come” (Eph. 1:21). This is a present reality, not a future expectation. Therefore, it’s cause for optimism and rejoicing: “Our God is an awesome God, He reigns...”

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