

3. Global Crisis and the Patriarchs (1Q 2016—Rebellion and Redemption)

Biblical material: Gen. 4:1–15; Gen. 3:9, 10; 4:9; Gen. 6:1–13; Ps. 51:1; Genesis 22; Gen. 28:12–15.

Quotes

- I am called to worship a God I cannot see, but not to submit to a God I cannot know and prove. *David Shepherd*
- Everything that we think God has in his mind necessarily proceeds from our own mind; it is what we imagine to be in God’s mind, and it is really difficult for human intelligence to guess at a divine intelligence. What we usually end up with by this sort of reasoning is to make God the color-sergeant of our army and to make Him as chauvinistic as ourselves. *Lin Yutang*
- People fashion their God after their own understanding. They make their God first and worship him afterwards. *Oscar Wilde*

Questions

What are we supposed to learn from examining the lives of the patriarchs? How does God look in these stories? Why does murder come in so quickly—and what does this tell us about the impact of the broken relationship with God? What challenges does God face in dealing with the Devil’s rebellion and his techniques?

Bible summary

Gen. 4:1–15 tells the sad story of Cain and Abel, and the first murder. Gen. 6:1–13 recounts the experience of the Flood, and that already “the LORD saw how great the wickedness of the human race had become on the earth, and that every inclination of the thoughts of the human heart was only evil all the time.” (Gen. 6:5 NIV). David recognized the damaging impact of sin in his life (Ps. 51:1). Some of Abraham’s story is told in Genesis 22, while Gen. 28:12–15 is part of the story of Jacob and Esau.

Comment

Whether it’s Cain and Abel, or Jacob and Esau, or Joseph and his brothers, or Noah and his contemporaries at the time of the Flood, or Abraham and his family—the story is the same. It’s all about fractured relationships, dysfunctional families, broken people. The results of separation from God: lies, deception, unfaithfulness, brutality, and murder. If we ever needed proof of where Lucifer’s way leads, here’s the evidence...

The ongoing consequences of Lucifer’s rebellion and the Fall of our first parents are clear. In fact without the “reboot” of the Flood, the demonstration of sin and its results would have already been over. God had to intervene because human thinking had become totally evil and the demonstration would have been finished prematurely. It takes time to reveal the heart of the rebellion and where it leads—for Satan’s methods are deceptive and the consequences of his thinking are not immediately obvious. In portraying himself as the great liberator against the tyranny of God he set the stage for a long and painful experience for all before he could be Unmasked for who he truly was and is.

The tragedy of sin's impact becomes very real in the lives of the patriarchs. How could murder come in so early? Sibling rivalry is well illustrated in the stories of Jacob and Esau, as well as Joseph and his brothers. Distrust and half-truths plague Abraham's experience. The lack of response to Noah's call to escape the coming destruction shows how far gone the Antediluvians had become. The great controversy plays out not only on the cosmic scale but also in our individual lives—as these patriarchs make abundantly clear.

The reaction of Adam and Eve to God after the Fall—fear—makes it hard for God to reveal himself and his true nature. Since God is feared, human beings need reassurance. In fact throughout the Bible God has to tell people they do not need to fear him, and to make promises to convince them. Firstly with Adam and Eve. Then with Noah and his descendants. Then Abraham, and the other patriarchs. Down on through history, God is still trying to win people over—telling us that we do not need to be afraid of him.

All this is a long way from what God would wish. It almost seems that so soon in the history of humanity God has to draw lessons for us from the way things should *not* be! All too often, despite the differences in time and culture, these Biblical patriarchs are so very much like us in their attitudes and inter-personal relations.

We should not lose sight here of the underlying causes and the continuing drama. The conflict between God and Satan is now playing out here on planet Earth and each one is involved. Satan is trying to win the battle for the minds of God's children, and his successes are all too obvious. If it is a question of numbers, then he is winning here, as the vast majority in the time of the Flood or the Tower of Babel demonstrated. Now generations later, Satan is still making a play for each and every person, through every trick in the book. Most significantly, by working through humanity's tendency to do things their own way, he seeks to draw the followers of God off-track, and to trust in their own schemes. The deceptive practices in these chapters of Genesis well illustrate the way in which he insinuates and suggests, leading these participants to follow their own inclinations and desires.

As we look again at these biographies of the patriarchs from the perspective of the great controversy we should understand how the issues are playing out—in their lives and ours.

Ellen White Comments

God speaks to us in his word. Here we have in clearer lines the revelation of his character, of his dealings with men, and the great work of redemption. Here is open before us the history of the patriarchs and prophets and other holy men of old. They were men “subject to like passions as we are.” We see how they struggled through discouragements like our own, how they fell under temptations as we have done, and yet took heart again and conquered through the grace of God; and beholding, we are encouraged in our striving after righteousness. As we read of the precious experiences granted them, of the light and love and blessing it was theirs to enjoy, and of the work they wrought through the grace given them, the spirit that inspired them kindles a flame of holy emulation in our hearts, and a desire to be like them in character,— like them to walk with God. {CE 56}