

Parashat Noach: Light Bearers

Genesis 6:5-6

“Then the Lord saw that the wickedness of man was great in the earth, and that every intent of the thoughts of his heart was only evil continually. And the Lord was sorry that He made man on the earth, and He was grieved in His heart.”

This is the backdrop to this week’s portion. The last time we read that "God saw" was when He looked upon all of His creation and saw that it was very good. It was perfect. Now, ten generations later, God's perfect creation is set to be destroyed. God looks upon His creation and perceives that the wickedness of man is great in the earth, so wicked that the entire earth has become corrupted. In the beginning, God enjoys the beauty, the harmony, and the perfection of His work. Now we read that *"the Lord was sorry that He had made man on the earth, and He was grieved in His heart" (6:6)*. He was grieved, because when He looked across the earth, He saw increasing wickedness, and when He searched deeper into the hearts of men, all He found was an inclination to do evil all the time. All of their thoughts, their feelings, their desires, their plans, were driven towards evil. As a result, the earth was being physically, spiritually and morally corrupted by their evil deeds--most of which was manifested through their unceasing violence. This is what God saw leading up to the days of Noah: over the course of time, sin spread, was left unchecked, and had reached its bitter end, which was death. Sadly, there was only one alternative: *"The end of all flesh has come before Me, for the earth is filled with violence through them; and behold, I will destroy them with the earth" (6:13)*. It's difficult to imagine humanity reaching such a point, a point in which this was the only solution.

Sadly, in this portion, it appears that societies and even mankind as a whole are capable of reaching a tipping point, a point when the measure of wickedness outweighs the presence of righteousness, making it seemingly impossible for people to turn back, to repent. This is the corrosive power of sin. Today, it is difficult for many individuals to conceive of or believe in a God that destroys entire civilizations, but the alternative is to witness them barbarically consume one another. Perhaps this is why God was so deeply grieved. After watching them destroy each other for ten generations, He knew that they were incapable of turning. He truly saw their end. There were certainly righteous people through these generations, but could it be that no matter how much righteousness and light you inject into these situations, the darkness is too great to overcome? Where were all of the righteous in Noah’s time? Of all the people who existed, only righteous Noah and his family could be found. This is not the only time in history we find the destruction of a people because the darkness within them has increased while the presence of righteousness diminished.

Later in Genesis, we find God informing Abraham of His plans to destroy Sodom and Gomorrah because *"the outcry against Sodom and Gomorrah is great, and because their sin is very grave" (Genesis 18:20)*. Once again, God goes down to see if the situation and the spiritual condition of the city are, in fact, as serious as the outcry seems to indicate. At this point, Abraham begins to plead with God, but not necessarily to spare the cities. No, he does not attempt to convince God to show mercy to the people in hopes that they will turn, but why? Did Abraham understand or see something that we do not? Instead, he begins pleading for the

righteous that may be in the city, asking God to not only spare the righteous, but to refrain from destruction on account of them: "*Suppose there were fifty righteous within the city; would you also destroy the place and not spare it for the fifty righteous that were in it?*" (**Genesis 18:24**). God listens to Abraham and tells him that He will spare the city for the sake of the ten righteous. This is the lowest number they agree to. As the story goes, there were only four who left and three who survived--Lot and his two daughters. In other words, there were only four who were righteous, and even of the righteous, only three survived. Had God spared the cities on behalf of these four, would it have been enough to turn the city, and stem the tide of darkness? Apparently not.

God did exactly as He promised: He sent messengers into the wicked city, yet even these righteous messengers were immediately confronted and assaulted by the wicked men of the city: "*Where are the men who came to you tonight? Bring them out to us that we may know them carnally*" (**Genesis 19:5**). The messengers' inquiry within the city didn't take long, and it led to same conclusion as in the days of Noah: "*For we will destroy this place, because the outcry against them has grown great before the face of the Lord, and the Lord has sent us to destroy it*" (**19:13**). This is tragic. Not only are the people increasingly corrupt, but they do not turn when God sends His messengers of righteousness, His witnesses. In fact, the wicked wage an even stronger war when righteousness is present (**John 3:20**). Perhaps Abraham knew as much as God did, that the fate of the cities was not in saving the wicked, per se, for they seemed to be well over the tipping point. The fate of the cities was in the hands and in the presence of the righteous. If there were enough righteous in the city, then perhaps it could have been spared, perhaps the entire city could have been preserved.

Maybe Abraham's heart was for the salvation of the entire city, or maybe he also understood their repentance would not be possible if the wicked severely outnumbered the righteous. When this occurs, then it is only a matter of time before the righteous are either dispatched or succumb to the evil themselves. In the book of Second Peter, we read that God "*turned Sodom and Gomorrah into ashes, condemned them to destruction, making them an example to those who afterward would live ungodly; and delivered righteous Lot, who was oppressed by the filthy conduct of the wicked (for that righteous man, dwelling among them, tormented his righteous soul from day to day by seeing and hearing their lawless deeds)*" (**2 Peter 2:6-8**). God delivered righteous Lot, but not until after he had already experienced a great deal of oppression and lawlessness from the wicked. His ears and eyes were filled with it, and we know that this takes a toll on the mind, on the spirit, and on the will. When wickedness increases and the light of the righteous begins to dim, this is the outcome--torment and oppression. In both stories, though, we see God intervene for the sake of the righteous. He frequently does, but this doesn't mean that it won't get difficult.

Toward the end of His earthly life, Jesus addresses these same realities and warns against the impending corruption that is to come in the end. Prior to telling His followers what was coming in their time and in the end, we find Him lamenting over His beloved city and His beloved people: "*O Jerusalem, Jerusalem, the one who kills the prophets and stones those who are sent to her! How often I wanted to gather your children together, as a hen gathers her chicks under her wings, but you were not willing*" (**Matthew 23:37**). Even God's beloved people allowed themselves to be overcome by wickedness, corruption, pride, and so much more. They not only

rejected the message of righteousness, but they killed those who brought it, including the Messiah. In the next chapter, Jesus warns us that as the end draws near, the moral and spiritual state of humanity will continue to decline. In fact, He says "*as the days of Noah were, so also will the coming of the Son of Man be. For as in the days before the flood, they were eating and drinking, marrying and giving in marriage, until the day that Noah entered the ark, and did not know until the flood came and took them all away, so also will the coming of the Son of Man be*" (**Matthew 24:37-39**). When we consider Jesus' warning, the words of Solomon ring true: "*That which has been is what will be, that which is done will be done, and there is nothing new under the sun*" (**Ecclesiastes 1:9**).

Peter tells us that Noah was a preacher of righteousness, and the ark he was building was a sign of God's impending judgment, yet the people rejected righteousness and scoffed at God's mercy. The world, in Noah's time, was becoming increasingly filled with violence and corruption and was rapidly moving farther away from righteousness. So it will be again in the future. Let us take heed. Jesus tells us that "*because lawlessness will abound, the love of many will grow cold. But he who endures--as Noah endured--to the end shall be saved... Unless those days were shortened, no flesh would be saved; but for the elect's sake those days will be shortened*" (**Matthew 24:12-13, 22**). As we draw closer to the end, many will continue to reject righteousness, and the hatred for the light will intensify. The love of many will grow cold because they will shut God's law out their hearts. Consequently, as it was in Noah's day, wickedness and corruption will begin to abound, so much so, that it will even be difficult for the elect, just as it was for righteous Lot.

From this time forth until the end, darkness will continue to push against and attempt to swallow up the light. We are beginning to witness and experience this more and more. The book of Revelation tells us why it will only get worse: "*Woe to the inhabitants of the earth and the sea! For the devil has come down to you, having great wrath, because he knows that he has a short time*" (**12:12**). Satan only has a short time, he will do everything he can to snuff out the light and attack those who bear the light, those who bear the testimony of Jesus and keep the commandments of God: "*And the dragon was enraged with the woman, and he went to make war with the rest of her offspring, who keep the commandments of God and have the testimony of Jesus Christ*" (**12:17**). Paul tells us that this has already been happening, that "*the mystery of lawlessness is already at work..., and the coming of the lawless one is according to the working of Satan, with all power, signs, and lying wonders, and with all unrighteous deception among those who perish, because they did not receive the love of the truth, that they might be saved*" (**2 Thessalonians 2:7, 9-10**). Lawlessness has been at work, and the forces of darkness will continue to wage war against the light. Those who prevail are those who have received the love of the truth. In these times, it is important that we continue to spread the good news, but it is perhaps of even greater importance that we continue to strengthen the righteousness in our gates and fight diligently to keep the light--the love and presence of truth--from going dim. For it is the light, those who are righteous, who will preserve the people. The book of Proverbs reminds us of this truth:

Proverbs 11:10-11

"When it goes well with the righteous, the city rejoices; and when the wicked perish, there is jubilation. By the blessing of the upright the city is exalted, but it is overthrown by the mouth of the wicked."

Even more so, Jesus spurs us on saying,

Matthew 5:13-16

"You are the salt of the earth, but if the salt loses its flavor, how shall it be seasoned? It is then good for nothing but to be thrown out and trampled underfoot by men. You are the light of the world. A city that is set on a hill cannot be hidden. Nor do they light a lamp and put it under a basket, but on a lampstand, and it give light to all who are in the house. Let your light so shine before men, that they may see your good works and glorify your father in heaven."

Though the darkness is and will continue to increase, may God strengthen the light in His people, and may He cause our righteousness to shine against the darkness. Yes, though the wicked mock us and scoff at the grace of God, may we continue to bear the light, continue building as Noah did, that what was said of him may be said of us:

Hebrews 11:7

"By faith Noah, being divinely warned of things not yet seen, moved with godly fear, prepared an ark for the saving of his household, by which he condemned the world and became heir of the righteousness which is according to faith."