

Genesis 9:1–7: Its Theological Connections with the Creation Motif

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Gen 9:1-7 is the first of a four-part divine speech to Noah and his family who survived the catastrophic Flood.¹ Several investigations have been done on this passage, with varied conclusions: (1) it is simply the biblical account of a post-Flood event already recorded in ANE literature, namely the *Atrahasis* and *Gilgamesh* Epics.² (2) It is inclusive of several “myths” which comprise Gen 1-11, the Primeval History.³ When combined, these myths detail a “pattern of increasing evil” or “progressive moral decline.”⁴ (3) It is part of a P document characterized by “formal and prolix legal prescription.”⁵ Regardless of the

¹The other three pericopes are vs. 8-11; 12-16; and 17. Each is introduced by the formulaic expression, *wayyō'mer ʾlōhīm*, “And God said.”

²Joseph Blenkinsopp, *The Pentateuch: An Introduction to the First Five Books of the Bible* (London: SCM, 1992), 57, remarks, “Even a fairly casual reading of these first eleven chapters [of Genesis] will confirm that the Atrahasis pattern is reproduced, with modifications, to a quite remarkable degree.” On the other hand, Gordon Wenham, *Genesis 1-15*, Word Biblical Commentary (Waco: Word, 1987), 205, has clearly delineated the sharp contrasts between the biblical and ANE accounts.

For information on these two ancient epics, see G. Larsson, “Chronological Parallels between the Creation and the Flood,” *VT* 27 (1977): 490-492; N. P. Lemche, “The Chronology in the Story of the Flood,” *JSOT* 18 (1980): 52-62; J. Laessle, “The Atrahasis Epic: A Babylonian History of Mankind,” *Bibliotheca Orientalis* 13 (1956): 90-102; W. G. Lambert and A. R. Millard, *Atrahasis* (Oxford: Clarendon, 1969); W. L. Moran, “Atrahasis: The Babylonian Story of the Flood,” *Bib* 52 (1971): 51-61; and J. H. Tigay, *The Evolution of the Gilgamesh Epic* (Philadelphia: U of Philadelphia P, 1982).

³Cf. Herbert Wolf, *An Introduction to the Old Testament Pentateuch* (Chicago: Moody, 1991), 81, who says, “It is common among scholars to relegate Genesis 1-11 to the realm of mythology and to consider chapter 12 as the start of the historical section . . .”

⁴Susan Niditch, *Chaos to Cosmos: Studies in Biblical Patterns of Creation* (Atlanta: Scholars, 1985), 66.

⁵Hermann Gunkel, *The Stories of Genesis*, trans John J. Scullion, ed William R. Scott (Vallejo, CA: Bibal Press, 1994), 110.

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scholarly debate, we can agree with Joseph Blenkinsopp that there is a correspondence between the events prior and subsequent to the Flood.⁶ He concludes, “We are therefore invited to interpret each in the light of the other, an invitation taken up, somewhat surprisingly, by few exegetes.”⁷ It is this writer’s desire to take up that invitation and demonstrate the theological connections with the Creation motif.

Literary Study

Literary Context. Gen 9:1-7 is located within a broad section in the book of Genesis that details the family history or “*tôldôth*” of Noah and spans 6:9-9:29.⁸ This entire section follows the pattern of an extended chiasmus:⁹

General introduction: 6:9-12 Noah and his generations

A 6:13-21 First divine speech. Addressed to Noah and preceded by reflections on Noah and mankind’s behavior (vs. 9-12). God’s resolve to destroy the earth.

B 6:22 Noah’s action: Obedience to God

C 7:1-4 Second divine speech: “Come *into* the ark”

D 7:5-16 Noah’s action and beginning of the Flood

E 7:17-24 The rising Flood

F 8:1a God **remembered** Noah

E’ 8:1b-5 The receding Flood

D’ 8:6-14 Noah’s action and the drying of the Earth

C’ 8:15-17 Third divine speech: “Come *out* of the ark.”

B’ 8:18-20 Noah’s action: Offerings to God

A’ 9:1-17 Fourth divine speech. Addressed to Noah and preceded by “reflections” within the heart of God Himself; that is, He resolves not to destroy mankind and the earth (8:20-22).

General conclusion: 9:18-29 Noah and his sons

⁶Blenkinsopp, 57-58. He regards the Flood as the “decisive event” in the structure of Gen 1-11.

⁷Ibid., 58.

⁸The *tôldôth* is a characteristic of Genesis and is found in 2:4; 5:1; 6:9; 10:1; 11:10, 27. For an extended discussion on the use of this expression in a formulaic manner, see Jacques Doukhan, *The Genesis Creation Story: Its Literary Structure*, Andrews University Doctoral Dissertation Series, vol 5 (Berrien Springs, MI: Andrews UP, 1978), 249-262. P. J. Wiseman, *Ancient Records and the Structure of Genesis: A Case for Literary Unity* (Nashville: Thomas Nelson, 1985), 59, describes *tôldôth* as “the master key . . . that underlies the structure of the book of Genesis. . . .”

⁹Adapted and modified from Gordon Wenham, *Genesis 1-15*, Word Biblical Commentary (Waco: Word, 1987), 156. (Hereafter *Genesis*). Cf. Idem, “The Coherence of the Flood Narrative,” *VT* 28 (1978): 336-48; Bernhard W. Anderson, “From Analysis to Synthesis: The Interpretation of Gen. 1-11,” *JBL* 97 (1978), 38; Isaac M. Kikawada and Arthur Quinn, *Before Abraham Was: The Unity of Genesis 1-11* (Nashville: Abingdon, 1985), 104. They adapt Wenham’s analysis and contend that this structural unity provides excellent evidence for the coherence of the Genesis Flood story while dispelling the interpretation of the documentary hypothesis.

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Note carefully that A and A' are alike in that both are lengthy monologues addressed to Noah, who is passive in both scenes, the recipient of the divine word. The vocabulary of both scenes is distinctive. The phrases “to ruin all flesh” (6:13; 9:11), “confirm my covenant” (6:18; 9:9), “fill the earth” (6:13; 9:1) and “to eat” (6:21; 9:3), occur only in these two scenes. Further, these are the only scenes concerned with violence (6:11,13) and bloodshed (9:5-6). Finally, there is the striking inversion that characterizes the whole Flood story: before the flood the world is doomed to destruction; afterward, its preservation is guaranteed.¹⁰

Gen 9:1-7, like the other divine speeches, is introduced by *wayyō'mer*. The pericope denotes God's blessing on mankind and His resolve not to destroy the earth and its inhabitants. God does not intend for violence¹¹ to fill the earth, as in section A of the chiasm. Instead, the earth is to be filled and repopulated, with decrees intended to limit human and animal violence. Noah emerges in the post-Flood era as a new Adam, the head of a new humanity, the recipient of the renewed commission to fill and repopulate the earth (9:1). Hence, the definitive focus of the pericope is to portray the “new beginning” of world history. The blessing of God allows humanity to entertain a new hope, the continuation of history. This comes on the heels of 8:21-22, which promises “that the rhythm of life shall never again be interrupted as long as the earth lasts.”¹² The section dramatizes mankind poised on the brink of a new civilization, initiated by the blessing of God (9:1).

Structure. Two broad outlines, identified by the style of writing,¹³ may be signified:

A. Prose in vs. 1-5

B. Poetry in vs. 6-7

Within each section there are specific poetic devices. For example, in the Prose section, v.1 is characterized by repetition of imperatives (“be fruitful,” “multiply,” “replenish” the earth); in vs. 2-3, alternative verbs “to be” and “to give” form the sequence AB:A'B'; vs. 4-5 contain restrictions introduced by *ʾak*. These verses also contain a word-play. The word *nepeš* is used here in three different senses: *b^enapšō* (“with the soul”), meaning, together with the element

¹⁰Wenham, *Genesis*, 155.

¹¹Violence denotes any anti-social, unneighborly activity. It refers to cold-blooded and unscrupulous infringement of the personal rights of others, motivated by greed and hate and often making use of physical violence and brutality. H. Haag, “*chamas*,” *Theological Dictionary of the Old Testament*, ed. G. Johannes Botterweck and Helmer Ringgren, trans. David E. Green (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1980), 4:482.

¹²Claus Westermann, *Genesis 1-11: A Commentary*, trans. John J. Scullion (Minneapolis: Augsburg, 1984), 461. (Hereafter, *Genesis*).

¹³On the level of content one may detect two sections: (1) what God gives to mankind (vs. 1-3); and (2) what God requires of mankind (vs. 4-7). See H. C. Leupold, *Exposition of Genesis* (Grand Rapids: Baker, 1953), 327.

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of life therein; *l'napšōthēkhem* (“unto your souls”), signifying, “that which is in you, of yourselves” (rendered “your own”),¹⁴ and *’eth-nepeš hā’ādhām* (“the soul of man”), connotes his actual life.¹⁵

In the poetic section v. 6a depicts a chiasm of the ABC:CBA pattern (which will be addressed below). Also, v. 7 demonstrates parallelism: “Be fruitful and multiply” is in synonymous parallelism to: “Bring forth abundantly . . . and multiply.” Note too, that the same imperative form is used.

This genre of divine speech, part prose, part poetry, is carefully structured with the express intent of heightening the theological emphases of the passage.

Theology

Several theological motifs are present in this passage, but let us examine four.

Theology of Creation (vs. 1, 7). This is the third time God has blessed mankind (1:28; 5:2), but only the second time this blessing is associated with the command to “be fruitful and multiply” (cf. 1:28). This first sentence repeats Gen 1:28 word for word.¹⁶ In fact, the accounts are linked semantically and theologically.¹⁷

¹⁴This term may be seen as a circumscription of the genitive, which places emphasis on the suffix “your.” Hence, the stress of v. 5 is “your blood, your own blood,” in contrast to the animals. It may be well to render the expression as “according to your persons,” that is, “individually.” See J. Skinner, *A Critical and Exegetical Commentary on Genesis*, 2d ed., International Critical Commentary (Edinburgh: Clark, 1930), 170.

¹⁵U. Cassuto, *A Commentary on the Book of Genesis*, trans. Israel Abrahams (Jerusalem: Magnes, 1964), 2:127.

¹⁶In v. 7 the BHS emendation of *rbh* (“to multiply”), to *rdh* (“to rule”) (cf. 1:28) is unjustified. C. J. Ball first did this emendation. See his, *The Book of Genesis: Critical Edition of the Hebrew Text Printed in Colours*, ed. P. Haupt, The Sacred Books of the OT (Baltimore: Johns Hopkins Press, 1896), 55. He based his decisions on the Tischendorf-Nestle edition of the LXX, which renders the word *rbh* as *katakuriusate* rather than by *plethunesthe*. This quickly gained acceptance. See Skinner, 171; Gerhard von Rad, *Das erste Buch Mose: Genesis kapitel 1-12:9*, 2d ed. (Göttingen: Vandenhoeck & Ruprecht, 1964), 107; E. A. Speiser, *Genesis*, Anchor Bible (Garden City, NY: Doubleday, 1964), 57. Careful investigation, however, shows that the best critical editions of the LXX support the MT. For example, the eclectic text in the edition of Genesis of A. Rahlfs, ed., *Septuaginta Societatis scientorum Gottingensis auctoritate*, I (Stuttgart: Württembergische Bibelanstalt, 1935), 68, uses *plethunesthe*. A similar reading is found in the *Larger Cambridge Edition* of A. E. Brooke and N. McLean based upon the Alexandrinus for Gen 1:1-46 (28). The same reading is found in the Septuagintal papyrus, the so-called “Berlin Genesis.” See H. A. Sanders and C. Schmidt, *The Minor Prophets in the Freer Collection and the Berlin Fragment of Genesis* (New York: Macmillan, 1927), 288f. Furthermore, in Gen 1:28, mankind is told to *subjugate* and *govern/rule* the earth and animals. Both imperatives go together, for they indicate the idea of the responsibility of rulership and control. In 9:7, however, *rbh* is used in association with *šrš*, both of which convey the idea of repopulation and regrowth. Hence, the emendation is not necessary.

¹⁷See Wenham, *Genesis*, 192.

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1:28 “God blessed and said, ‘Be fruitful and multiply and fill the earth.’”

9:1 “*God blessed and said, ‘Be fruitful and multiply and fill the earth.’*”

1:28 “rule . . . every living creature”

9:3 “*The fear and dread of you on everything*”

1:28 “I have given you . . . for food”

9:3 “. . . yours to eat, as I gave you the green vegetation”

1:27 “God created man in His image”

9:6b “*in the image of God He made men*”

Hence, the main theological point of Creation is clearly established semantically, in that the express language of Creation is used. Here, as in the Creation account, God blesses (cf. 1:22, 28; 2:3; 5:2). Divine blessing is one of the great unifying themes in Genesis. God blesses sea creatures and birds (1:22), mankind (1:28), the Sabbath (2:3), Adam (5:2), Noah (9:1), and the Patriarchs (12:3; 17:16, etc.).

This blessing is most obviously visible in the gift of children, as this is coupled with being “fruitful” (cf. 1:22, 28; 9:1,7). So the word of blessing, pronounced by God, guarantees the end result. Further, the divine imperatives, here repeated (9:1,7), emphasize the divine promise that they can be effected. The repetition serves the theological function.

The vocabulary of the passage also betrays a theological awareness of Creation. The verb *prh* (*pārāh*) is used twenty-nine times in the Old Testament, fifteen times in Genesis alone. It means generally “to be fruitful.” The word *rbh* is used over 200 times in the Old Testament. It generally means “to multiply,” “to increase,” “to be many.” It has a wide range of meaning, showing its latitude. Both *prh* and *rbh* are frequently found together (cf. 1:28; 17:6, 20; 28:3; 41:52; 48:4), and especially when used with the Patriarchs, they are concerned with the promise to increase. Outside of the Pentateuch, this formula is used in Jer 3:16, 23:3, and Ezek 36:11, within the context of the promise to increase the people after their restoration and renewal. They also occur in the Psalms (128:3; 107:38) and in the Prophets in the context of the promise of blessing.¹⁸

It also appears that the writer is deliberately exploiting the phonetic similarity of the terms “bless” (*brk*), “be fruitful” (*prh*) and “multiply” (*rbh*) by juxtaposing them.¹⁹

Furthermore, similar repetition is found in 9:7. Here, the verbal sequence is **a → b → c → b**: “be fruitful” (**a**) and “multiply” (**b**); “swarm the earth” (**c**) and

¹⁸See Westermann, *Genesis*, 140-141. See also A. Yegerlehner, “‘Be Fruitful and Multiply and Fill the Earth.’ A History of the Interpretation of Gen. 1:28a and Related Texts in Selected Periods” (Ph.D. diss., Boston University Graduate School, 1975).

¹⁹For further discussion, see Josef Scharbert, “*brk*,” *TDOT*, 2:279-308; Claus Westermann, *Blessing in the Bible and Life of the Church*, trans. Keith Crim (Philadelphia: Fortress, 1978).

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“multiply” (b).²⁰ Here we see an example of multiple coordination where four clauses are naturally paired. Each pair is a hendiadys: “be fruitful” (A) and “multiply” (B); “swarm” (C) and “multiply” (D). The pattern of this grouping is as such: A and B, C and D. Each pair can amount to a composite description of a single action. For example, *p^erû ûr^ehû*, “increase and multiply,” means “be abundantly fruitful.”²¹ This expression forms an inclusio with v. 1. We may also note that “the first time *ûr^ehû* (and multiply) forms part of the compound expression *p^erû ûr^ehû* (be fruitful and multiply), it signifies the raising up of seed; the second time it is used by itself, and its primary use is to increase numerically.”²²

Perhaps this repetition of the divine command, echoing the earlier commands (1:26, 28), “makes it probable that the Bible *consciously rejected* the underlying theme of the Atrahasis Epic, that the fertility of man before the Flood was the reason for his near destruction.”²³

Other key words which reflect the theological concept of Creation and the blessing are “fill” (*ml'*) and “swarm” (*šrs*). The verb “to fill” is the third word that explains the blessing (v. 1). The same three-verb sequence is in Gen. 1:22 and 1:28: “Be fruitful, and multiply, and fill the earth”. Used about 249 times in the Old Testament, the verb “to fill” (*ml'*) primarily denotes a spatial signification.²⁴ Used with the imperatives, “be fruitful and multiply,” the imperative “fill the earth”²⁵ declares an increased point of abundance which belongs directly to the promise.²⁶

Usually, the stem “to swarm” (cf. 1:20), used only 14 times, refers to the swift motion of small animals, as a teeming, prolific multitude.²⁷ As used in Gen 9:2, however, it is in contradistinction to small animals, because the subject refers to human beings (*'attem*, “you”), referring to Noah and his sons. In this manner, the use of this word “swarm” illustrates tremendous abundance. Exod 1:7, where the same verb roots are used as here, well illustrates the point: “The

²⁰See B. Porten and U. Rappaport, “Poetic Structure in Gen. 9:7, *VT* 21 (1971): 368. Many examples of this structure occur in Hebrew poetry. Cf. J. S. Kselman, “The ABCB Pattern: Further Examples,” *VT* 32 (1982): 224-229.

²¹Francis I. Andersen, *The Sentence in Biblical Hebrew* (The Hague & Paris: Mouton, 1974), 99, 117.

²²Cassuto, 129.

²³Wenham, *Genesis*, 166; A. D. Killmer, “The Mesopotamian Concept of Over-population and Its Solution as Reflected in the Mythology,” *Orientalia* 41 (1972): 174-175.

²⁴Cf. Walter C. Kaiser, “*mālē*,” *Theological Wordbook of the Old Testament*, ed. R. Laird Harris (Chicago: Moody, 1980), 1:505.

²⁵In the OT, the use of *'eres*, “earth,” “land,” usually points to universality and limitless space. It is not a confined area. However, *'ādāmāh*, “land,” is usually used when a delimited area is designed. See Leonard J. Coppes, “*'ādāmāh*,” *TWOT*, 1:10-11; Victor P. Hamilton, “*'eres*,” *TWOT*, 1: 74-75.

²⁶Westermann, *Genesis*, 141.

²⁷The word *rāmas* is to some extent synonymous, but has a distinct difference by designating animals as a creeping, crawling, wiggling mass.

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children of Israel were *fruitful* and *increased abundantly* (lit. “teemed”) and *multiplied* and the land was filled with them.”

Theology of Humanity’s Dominion over Animals (v. 2). This dominion had already been given to mankind at creation (1:26, 28). Adam and Eve were to rule or govern (*rdh*) the animal kingdom. This does not refer to “unbridled exploitation and subjugation of nature,”²⁸ since the animals were viewed as people’s companions (2:18-20). Besides, Noah was given the responsibility to preserve the lives of animals from destruction during the Flood (6:20; 7:3). Here, however, people’s dominion is described in terms of the “dread and fear” on the part of all animals toward people.²⁹

The expression, “the fear of you and the dread of you,” which occurs only once in Genesis, is distinct military terminology (cf. Deut 11:25). It reflects the animosity between humanity and the animal world, consequent to the Fall. This enmity was lacking in the original mandate to “have dominion over them” (1:26).

Again, the expression “into your hands they have been given,” expresses the signification of deliverance in the absolute control of another, to be dealt with as the other determines (cf. Deut 19:12; 20:13; Lev 26:25; Job 1:12).³⁰ C. F. Keil and F. Delitzsch comment:

Inasmuch as sin with its consequences had loosened the bond of voluntary subjection on the part of the animals to the will of man . . . it was only by force that he could rule over it. By that “fear and dread” which God instilled into the animal creation.³¹

Theology of Dietary Laws (vv. 3-4).³² This, too, reflects Creation in that both accounts deal with the diet of the people. In Gen 1:29, however, people are permitted to eat only plants and their produce. Now meat is permitted, as indicated by the expression “every moving thing that is alive” (v. 3), namely, animals, birds, and fish, all of which were given into his hand. This is further amplified by the alternation of the verbs “*to be*” and “*to give*” into an AB:A’B’

²⁸Wenham, *Genesis*, 33.

²⁹The phrase, “the fear of you and the dread of you,” is an example of hendiadys, with the suffixes acting as objective genitives.

³⁰Westermann, *Genesis*, 462, indicates that this is the language of Holy War.

³¹C. F. Keil & F. Delitzsch, *Commentary on the OT: The Pentateuch*, trans. James Martin (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1952), 152. For a wider discussion of this theological point, see D. K. Jobling, “‘And Have Dominion’: The Interpretation of OT Texts Concerning Man’s Rule Over Creation (Gen 1:26, 28; 9:1-2; Ps 8:7-9) From 100 B.C. to the Time of Nicea” (Ph.D. diss., Union Theological Seminary, 1972). In association, see Doukhan, 47, note 1.

³²Verses 3-4 give an example of exclusive sentences where the lead clause states a general rule and the exclusive clause states a limiting exception, with negation. The conjunction in these cases, as here, is *ʾak*, and is equivalent to the adversative “however.” Hence, we may translate, “I have given you everything; however, flesh with *its life*, *its blood*, you shall not eat.” We must also note the apposition of “its life” to “its blood.” The effect is to specifically detail the limitation incurred. See Andersen, 173.

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sequential pattern, thus showing the relationship between vs. 2 and 3. Hence, humanity's dominion over the animals extends to the concession of eating meat. Further, the expression, "that is alive," (v. 3) precludes as edible any animal that has died of natural causes (cf. Lev 11:40; Deut 14:21).³³

Although the distinction between clean and unclean is not given, the frequent mention and distinction between clean and unclean animals made elsewhere within the same broad fixtures of the story (7:2; 8:20), "makes it problematic to assert that total freedom is being given here."³⁴

Furthermore, God is the one who gives mankind not only plants and their produce, but also animal flesh. J. Milgrom contends that "whereas the subject of *nātan* is God, it means 'bestow, appoint, assign' (Num 8:10; 18:8; Lev 6:10; 7:34; Gen 1:29)."³⁵ Further, the context is always that of God effectively blessing.³⁶ Therefore, one sees a dilemma in that the gift of blessing that is here bestowed includes the permission to kill for food. It is this tension that necessitates the restriction of v. 4: "Surely flesh with its life, its blood, you shall not eat." The prohibition is introduced by the particle *ʾak*, "surely, indeed." This is used in legal texts to show important restrictions.³⁷

The injunction is strong in that there is to be expressly no eating of blood, the reason being that blood is associated with life.³⁸ Or put another way, blood is the constitutive element of life. Here *nepes*³⁹ is in apposition to *dam*, indicating that life is equal to the blood. Elsewhere in Genesis *nepes* is also associated with life. In 2:7 the man is described as a living being after God gave the breath of life. Hence, the prohibition from eating "flesh with its life in it" is an inherent, implicit call to attention for the respect and sanctity of life. As Wenham comments, "It is easy to see why blood is identified with life: a beating heart and a

³³Wenham, *Genesis*, 192.

³⁴*Ibid.*, 193. See also L. Dequeker, "Green Herbage and Trees Bearing Fruit (Gen. 1:28-30; 9:1-3): Vegetarianism or Predominance of Man over Animals?" *Bijdragen* 38 (1977): 118-127.

³⁵J. Milgrom, "A Prolegomenon to Lev 17:11," *JBL* 90 (1971): 150.

³⁶Westermann, *Genesis*, 463.

³⁷T. Muraoka, *Emphatic Words and Structures in Biblical Hebrew* (Jerusalem: Magnes, 1985), 130.

³⁸The prohibition of eating flesh with its blood is enjoined several times in the Pentateuch (Lev 3:17; 7:26; 17:10-24; Deut 12:23-24). This is expressly because the blood is the life; it must be poured out and covered before the flesh is consumed. Furthermore, Lev 17:11 advocates that the blood is special because it is for the making of atonement. The penalty for eating blood is explicit: *krt*, "to cut off" (Lev 7:27; 17:10, 14). It implies death, some sort of outlawry, perhaps banishment or ostracism.

³⁹The term *nepes* is very common in the OT (754 occurrences) and has a wide range of meaning, including, "appetite, throat, person, self, corpse, soul, life," among others. See Edmond Jacob, "Psyche," *Theological Dictionary of the New Testament*, ed. Gerhard Friedrich, trans. & ed. G. W. Bromiley (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1974), 9:617-631; W. H. Schmidt, "Anthropologische Begriffe im AT," *EvT* 24 (1974):374-388.

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strong pulse are the clearest evidence of life. Respect for life, and beyond that, respect for the giver of life, means abstaining from blood.”⁴⁰

The injunction is further highlighted by the numerous texts insisting that blood should be drained out of an animal before consumption (Lev 3:17; 7:26-27; 17:10-14; 18:26; Deut 12:16-24; 1 Sam 14:32-34).

Theology of the Sanctity of Human Life (vs. 5-6). This theological idea is introduced by the restrictive particle *ʔak*, as in v. 4. Hence, both verses are inter-related. However, although the blood of animals may be shed but not partaken (v. 4), the blood of a person is never to be shed (v. 5).⁴¹

Verse 5 displays a stylistic device by placing emphasis on the verb “to require, demand” (*drš*). Westermann outlines it like this:⁴²

But: Your own blood	will I demand
from all animals	will I demand it
and from human in turn	
the life of a person	will I demand.

The key word here is *drš*. This root is attested in many Semitic languages: Aramaic, Arabic, Ethiopic and Syriac. It is used about 165 times in the Old Testament, especially in the qal form. Basically it connotes “to seek,” “to ask, or “to demand.” Yet there is variation according to context. Hence, the many nuances: “demanding,” “avenging,” “investigating,” “searching,” or “striving for.” It is frequently used in contexts suggesting an element of activity, action, and energy (Deut 23:6; Est 10:3; Ps 38:13). Specifically, the root is used in legal terms in the Old Testament. This is the realm of judicial inquiry, as in Gen 9:6. Hence, it indicates the activity of “requiring,” “avenging,” or seeking recompense.⁴³

While Westermann’s analysis correctly highlights the repetition of the verb, it fails to observe the three prepositional phrases, each introduced by *miyyad*, which emphasize the movement from the general to the specific:

(1) Divine reckoning is first demanded “from the hand of every wild animal.” God requires or demands an account from the beasts, that is, the animal world at large. Any beast that kills a person, its life was forfeited. Exod 21:28-29 illustrates this fact by signifying that an ox that gores a man is to be summarily killed.

⁴⁰Wenham, *Genesis*, 193. The prohibition of eating blood has profoundly influenced Moslem thought. As such, strict ritual is used in slaughtering animals. This ritual is known as the *dhaka’a*. It takes into account the proper subjects for ritual slaughter; who may perform the slaughter; and how the slaughter is to be done. Cutting off part of an animal before it is dead is expressly forbidden. See *Kur’an* 5:4; 6:147. Cf. G. H. Bousquet, “*DhABIHA*,” *The Encyclopedia of Islam*, ed B. Lewis, Ch. Pellat and J. Schacht (Leiden: Brill, 1965), 2:21-214; M. Robinson, “*GHIDA*,” *ibid.*, 2:1067-1072.

⁴¹K. Koch, “Der Spruch Sein blut Bleibe Auf Seinem Haupt und Die Israelische Auffassung vom vergossenen Blut” *VT* 12 (1962): 409-410.

⁴²Westermann, *Genesis*, 466.

⁴³S. Wagner, “*Dārash*,” *TDOT*, 3: 293-307.

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(2) Accountability from human beings in general is specified in the expression “from the hand of the man” (*miyyaḏ ḥā’āḏām*).

(3) In distinction to this generic description, the third clause, “at the hand of every man, his brother,”⁴⁴ expresses the responsibility of each individual. Evidently, the text is emphasizing the nature of what is being “sought.” It is human life, and nothing less, that is demanded in light of the nature of the crime.⁴⁵ Divine reckoning calls for the life of the person who expressly commits murder. Keil and Delitzsch comment: “*’āḥîv* here is not just the colorless ‘another’; it carries the full meaning of brother. Murder is the ultimate violation of the brotherly relationship of humankind.”⁴⁶

Significantly, this is the first time that “brother” is used since Gen 4, where the word is used repeatedly to emphasize the wrong act of Cain. So it is probable that this story is here lurking in the background. As such, Cassuto indicates, “Whoever takes human life is like Cain. [Therefore] how much more so shall I require a reckoning for the blood of man in this instance, seeing that the slain person is the brother of the slayer.”⁴⁷

The three-fold injunction demanding a reckoning is now specified in v. 6. The first part (6a),⁴⁸ exhibits a chiasm, word for word, of the ABC:CBA type:

A The one who <i>pours</i> out	C by man
B the blood	B his blood
C of man	C will be <i>poured</i> out. ⁴⁹

The key verb here is *šāpak*. It is used 113 times in the Old Testament and basically means “to pour out” or “to empty.” It is used when water, broth (Exod 4:9; Jud 6:20) or blood is poured out, this being its most frequent usage. Its common synonym, *yāsaq*, is never used with the shedding of blood. Hence, *šāpak*, as used in Gen 9:6, implies willful murder or the deliberate taking of

⁴⁴The brevity of the Hebrew *miyyaḏ ’îsh ’āḥîv* causes difficulty. Sometimes *’îsh* is used to express the idea of “each” or “every.” In a few passages, *’îsh*, in this sense, is placed for the sake of emphasis before the governing noun (always a substantive with a suffix). Thus, *miyyaḏ ’îsh ’āḥîv*, according to the explanation, stands for *miyyaḏ ’āḥîv ’îsh*, that is, “at the hand of the brother of every man.” It is more likely, however, that the substantive is in apposition to *’îsh* (MT); thus, “at the hand of every man, his brother.” See *Gesenius’ Hebrew Grammar*, ed. & enl. by E. Kautzsch; 2d Eng. ed. rev. A. E. Cowley (Oxford: Clarendon, 1910), 448 (139c).

⁴⁵Lloyd M. Barre, “The Poetic Structure of Gen. 9:5,” *ZAW* 96 (1984): 101-104.

⁴⁶Keil & Delitzsch, 152-53.

⁴⁷Cassuto, 127.

⁴⁸There is variation in the interpretation of v. 6a. According to Westermann, *Genesis*, 467, G. von Rad calls it “an extremely ancient sentence from social legal terminology.” G. Liedke, “Gestalt und Bezeichnung alttestamentlicher Rechtssätze,” *WMANT* 39 (1971): 117, sees it as associated with apodictic law and distinguishes it from both casuistic law and prohibitions.

⁴⁹Blenkensopp, 85, describes this as “the enunciation of a legal principle, a sentence of law, in gnomic style and chiasmic form. . . .” S. E. McEvenue, *The Narrative Style of the Priestly Writer* (Rome: BIP, 1971), 70, indicates that the chiasmic structure “leans . . . toward proverb style” and is close to the *lex taliones* of Lev 24:19-20.

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life.⁵⁰ With this view, the chiasm lends itself to emphasize “the strict correspondence of punishment to offense.”⁵¹ (Cf. Lev 24:16-22). Therefore, one can say that here God is placing a barrier against the supremacy of evil. In doing so, He has established “the foundation for an orderly civil development of humanity.”⁵²

The reason for the strict injunction is now given in 6b: “Because in the image of God, He made man” (cf. 1:27). This is the ground upon which punishment of murder is based, as introduced by *kî* (“because”).⁵³

The expression “image of God” has been treated to various interpretations.⁵⁴ It is peculiar to Gen 1:26, 27 and 9:6. The rarity of *selem* (“image,” which is used only seventeen times in the OT), and the uncertainty of its etymology, makes the interpretation of this phrase very difficult. It may be that *selem* comes from a root meaning “to cut” or “to hew,” as attested in Arabic. This would fit the idea of physical image, especially in realizing that the most frequent meaning of *selem* refers to physical image (1 Sam 6:5; Num 33:52; Ezek 16:17. Cf. Gen 5:3, where Seth is after Adam’s image). In any event, mankind is made “in our image” (1:26), that is, “the image of God” (1:27; 9:6). This establishes a direct link with the Creation motif. John H. Sailhamer underscores this fact when he comments, “It is significant that just as in Genesis 1, the focus of the author’s interest in human beings after the Flood is their creation in God’s image (9:6).”⁵⁵ Hence, this writer sees this expression as connoting the uniqueness of human beings (in contradistinction to animals) in that we are God’s counterparts. As Westermann indicates, “The relationship to God is not something

⁵⁰Hermann J. Austel, “*shopkah*,” *TWOT*, 2: 950.

⁵¹Wenham, *Genesis*, 193.

⁵²Francis D. Nichol, ed. *The Seventh-day Adventist Bible Commentary* (Washington, D. C.: Review & Herald, 1976), 1: 264.

⁵³See further V. Woller, “Zur Übersetzung von in Gen. 8:21 and 9:6,” *ZAW* 94 (1982): 637-638.

⁵⁴B. Jacob, *The First Book of the Bible, Genesis*, trans. Ernest I. Jacob (New York: Ktav, 1974), 59, says that this points to spiritual qualities. W. Eichrodt, *Theology of the OT*, trans. J. A. Baker (Philadelphia: Westminster, 1967), 2:118ff; L. Kohler, “Die Grundstelle der Imago-Die-Lehre, Gen. 1:26,” *ThZ* 4 (1948): 16-22, claim that it refers to likeness in the external form. K. Barth, *Church Dogmatics III/1: The Doctrine of Creation*, ed. G. W. Bromiley & T. F. Torrance; trans. J. W. Edwards, O. Bussey, Harold Knight (Edinburgh: Clark, 1958), 182ff, maintains that it points to the person as God’s counterpart. E. Jacob, “Le theme de l’Imago Dei dans l’AT,” *Congress of the Orientalists Bol. II* (1957): 583-585, says that this is a reference to the person as God’s representative on earth. Irenaeus believed that a distinction must be made between *imago* and *similitudo*. He contends that “image” here refers to natural qualities in a person (reason, personality, and so forth) that make him resemble God. See Alexander Roberts and J. Donaldson, ed. *The Ante-Nicene Fathers*, (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1950), 2:573ff. For further information, see Westermann, “Excursus: The History of the Exegesis of Gen. 1:26-27,” *Genesis*, 147-155.

⁵⁵See his *The Pentateuch as Narrative: A Biblical-Theological Commentary*, Library of Biblical Interpretation (Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 1992), 128.

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which is added to human existence; humans are created in such a way that their very existence is intended to be their relationship to God.”⁵⁶

In any event, the effect and purpose are clearly highlighted: murder is a direct revolt and assault against God. The murderer despoils God. He disrespects God’s sovereign right and rule over life. He violates the “image of God” in the person. Hence, the death penalty is invoked for anyone who thus desecrates life: he must pay with his life for taking another’s. The central subject is clearly the absolute inviolability of human life. Behind it is the command, “Thou shall not kill.”⁵⁷ God was protecting humanity’s rights by attaching a penalty to willful murder. If one murderer were permitted to go free and subvert others by his evil experience and cruel violence, this would result in conditions similar to the pre-Flood era. This was a measure to sacredly guard human life.⁵⁸

The prohibition of taking human life (vs. 5-6) is stated with certainty in the Pentateuch (Exod 20:12; 21:12; Lev 24:16-22; Num 35:30-34). The express fact is that the one who kills was himself to be killed: “he shall be put to death” (Lev 24:21). Further, the shedding of blood concerned all Israel because it polluted the land.⁵⁹ As such, Israel was admonished neither to allow compensation for murder nor to let an accidental murderer leave a City of Refuge:

You shall take no ransom for the life of a murderer who deserves to die.
He shall be executed . . . You shall not pollute the land that you are in,
for the blood will pollute the land, and the land may not be redeemed
for blood spilled in it except by the blood of the spiller (Lev 35:31-34)

Therefore, in the context of Gen 9, v. 7 is more than a restatement of v. 1. It emphasizes the divine purpose for mankind to multiply and fill the earth. Violence and murder are diametrically opposed to God’s plan of growth and filling the earth. Verse 7 emphasizes this opposition and adds the crucial word *srt*, which directs the attention to the divine mandate to spread throughout the earth.

⁵⁶Westermann, *Genesis*, 158. See further, James Barr, “The Image of God in the Book of Genesis: A Study of Terminology,” *BJRL* 51 (1968-69): 11-26; D. J. A. Clines, “The Image of God in Man,” *TB* 19 (1968): 53-103; idem, “The Etymology of Hebrew *selem*,” *JNSL* 3 (1974): 19-25.

⁵⁷Jewish rabbinical tradition emphasizes the prohibition against murder. According to *Sanhedrin*, 380, 390-391, punishment for this must be decapitation or strangulation, and it can be done on the ruling of one judge, the testimony of one witness, on the evidence of a man, but not a woman, even if the witness is a relative. This execution could be done even for the “murder of an embryo.” For further commentary on vs. 5ff, see *Shab.*, 152.

⁵⁸Nichol, 1:1091; E. G. White, *Patriarchs and Prophets* (Omaha, NE: Pacific Press, 1958), 516.

⁵⁹See Tikva Frymer-Kensky, “The Atrahasis Epic and Its Significance for our Understanding of Gen. 1-9,” *BA* 40 (1977): 147-155. The author postulates that the Flood was not merely for the means of punishment, but was also for cleansing the land of the pollution caused by the extensive corruption and violence of the people. The flood was the “means of getting rid of a thoroughly polluted world and starting again with a clean, well-washed one” (153).

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Relevance and Conclusion

As has been shown, the passage clearly indicates its theological significance and link with Creation. This link has been observed both on the linguistic and on conceptual levels. God's pronounced blessing on the survivors definitely reflects the Creation event, in that a new starting point of human history is recorded.

First, the blessing to repopulate and rejuvenate the earth, as in Creation, is restated. The blessing's fulfillment is plainly seen in the multiplication of people on the earth. By the same token, later generations right up to the present time are to enjoy that blessing and affirm the responsibility attached to it. Procreation is not merely the result of a sexual encounter, but encompasses a divine sanctification. As such, it must be regarded with utmost sacredness.

Second, human dominion over the animal kingdom, as specified at the Creation, is reaffirmed. However, the difference must be noted: now fear and dread are involved. The same applies at present. Yet, as in Creation, humanity is expected to act responsibly to the animal world and not engage in the useless slaughter of animals.

Third, the food law restates the emphasis on purity in that, in addition to plant or vegetable foods, mankind is allowed to eat only clean meats, and that without the blood. The eating of plant food harks back to Creation, and the allowance of animal flesh was only intended to be supplementary.

Finally, in connection with the above, the sanctity of human life is affirmed. Because mankind was created in God's image, any deadly assault on a person is an attack against God. The gravity of this fact has led some today to proclaim the death penalty for heinous murder. In any event, the central factor is the absolute inviolability of human life, because people are made in God's image.

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