



ANE CONTEXT OF A BIBLICAL TEXT

**OT504: The Hebrew Bible
& the Eastern
Mediterranean World:
OB**

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In this paper analysis a comparison will be drawn between John H. Walton's, "Ancient Near Eastern Thought and the Old Testament: Introducing the Conceptual World of the Hebrew Bible, Part 5: People, Chapter 13 and Genesis 6-9, Noah and the Ark. Walton's ANE text will be used in order to see the instances that influence the Biblical text in Genesis 6-9. Comparing Walton's ANE text of ancient people's thoughts and Biblical text gives a better insight of the Wisdom of God being released to Noah, his sons and family. Finally, this paper will state how these studies have helped in comparing ANE people thoughts vs modern-day thoughts of Biblical text.

Genesis 6-9 analyzes the story of Noah, the flood and the Ark and the covenant between God, Noah, his sons and family. To get a better understanding of the story, the relationship of Noah's family is compared to ANE people of their times to their gods. In Chapter 13 of Walton's ANE text it is stated that the people did not know whether they pleased their gods or not, most time they just gave sacrifices and prayed general prayers to appease their gods. "Appeasement could theoretically be accomplished by the identification of the offense and the offering of an appropriate sacrifice."¹ On the other hand, Noah had a relationship with God. God stated himself, "This is the account of Noah and his family(נֹחַ וְאִתּוֹ), his household.) Noah was a righteous (יָשָׁר, just) man, among the people of his time, and he walked faithfully with God"(Genesis 6:9). For this reason, God spoke directly to Noah to let him know he would destroy the earth and every living thing on it. Noah did not question God, demonstrating that he felt God had more wisdom than he had. While ANE people demonstrated that they did not know if they were even acknowledged by the gods, to the point that their way of life did not guarantee that the gods would rescue them. In fact they felt that the gods would make no effort to save

1 (Walton 2018), location

them. “In the proverbial literature of the Ancient Near East, virtually nothing can be found regarding understanding deity or relating to deity.”²

God had a covenant relationship with Noah, his sons and family. After destroying the earth with water, he stated he would never do this again. Then God said to Noah and to his sons with him: “I now establish my covenant (בְּרִית, treaty) with you and with your descendants after you and with every living creature that was with you on the ark. I establish my covenant with you: never again will there be a flood to destroy the earth” (Genesis 8:9-10, NIV). I had read this scripture all my life since I was a child, but I did not see some of the detailed covenant relations demonstrated in this scripture, until I read ANE text. I would read through it not understanding that the covenant made with man, included all creatures that had been created by God. Not only did the animals listen to God, they had faith in him to keep his covenant with them and with men. This actually showed God interacting with men, to restore a covenant relationship between God and man. Again he offered redemption for all of Noah and his family, if they would walk in the ordinances. During the time they were on the ark the divine order of God, where men had dominion was demonstrated again to men.

In the ANE text, the gods did not make any real effort to alleviate men of their sins, or to restore order to creation. The people of the time had come to expect no direct offer of redemption. They thought their fate was dependent upon not angering the gods and kept seeking out help from men, mediums, rituals and spirits of the dead ancestors to intercede on their behalf. Rules were given to them from men, warning omens and a structured way of life to help them make right decisions and please the gods. “If this is indeed the case, it is not so much that the omens were intended to predict as that because of a past correlation they drew particular issues to

² (Walton 2018), location 8124.

one's attention ."³ There is a lack of hope other than to try to please the gods. The gods were considered to be distant, the gods ruled upon their strength, or through defeating one another. Maduk was the king of the gods because he had defeated a chaotic beast. Men had to be prepared to face judgments at different stages of their life, with no real remedy to be delivered other than the actions of the gods. The gods were thought to have faults just like men, and to have relationships with each other, and men upon their own pleasure. The ANE people did not consider the gods to be just. "Appeasement could theoretically be accomplished by the identification of the offense and the offering of an appropriate sacrifice ."⁴ They would pledge their allegiance to gods and the King, depending upon the King to administer justice to them.

Noah and his sons and their family followed all the orders of God, despite the time and effort needed to complete these tasks, time and years to prepare for the fulfilling of his promise. They had to fulfill all the instructions of God, enter into the ark with the instructions of God, with the animal believing that God would keep his covenant with them. "And God said, "This is the sign of the covenant I am making between me and you and every living creature with you, a covenant for all generations to come; I have set my rainbow in the clouds." (Genesis 9:12-13)." God was considered the highest God with all power in his hand. Noah, his family and the animals knew they could trust in his word. As always , the main differences emerge when we consider the aspect of the influence of religion — covenant observance and the nature of Yahweh .⁵ God was attentive to Noah and his son's lives and considered their faithfulness to his ordinances in order to give them justice and a chance to live in covenant relationship with him. We can trace back God's relationship with his people, how he had delivered and how he has restored their rightful place again and again, as they were obedient to his will. He did not only

³ Ibid, p. 6843.

⁴ Ibid, Location 8091.

⁵ Ibid, Location 8123.

care about justice for men, he interacted with them as a people, he sent prophets, gave ordinances to live, which told them how to please God. God is a just God, faithful God, righteous God with all power in his hands. However, God is a jealous God and will not always suffer men and their disobedience of serving/worshipping other gods.

In conclusion, Noah and his sons were guided by love, grace and hope for a better life, and a better relationship with God. The people of the ANE were unsure of their fate, and looked to a hierarchy of gods, with unclear encounters with them to give them hope. They relied on repetitive prayers, omens, and untrustworthy promises, from some gods who were not considered powerful enough to grant them full pardon for their sins. The gods were not faithful to each other, let alone men. These gods wanted justice in the human realm and were not committed to rendering justice themselves. ANE people did not expect just retribution from their gods. They had no knowledge of their destiny, but only hope that they could endure the trials after death to enter into their rest. In the ancient world the king stood between the divine and human realms, mediating the power of the deity in his city and beyond.⁶ As a result their fate was in men's justice, not the justice of their gods. Thank God that our lives are 'ordered by God', and if we are faithful to his commandments, we know we have a place with him in heaven. Noah, his sons and their wives and family knew they could depend upon God to do exactly as he promised. We still have the rainbow today as proof of the covenant between God and Noah, his family and the animals of the world.

⁶ Ibid, p. 7249.

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