

## Hamas and the Judgments of God

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“Now the earth was corrupt in God’s sight, and the earth was filled with *hamas*. - GENESIS 6:11

The ancient Babylonian Atrahasis Epic, which has survived in fragmentary form (the oldest fragment is from the mid-17th century BC), unfolds a fascinating mythic creation and flood account on three of its tablets. The comparisons of this epic to the Genesis account of the worldwide flood of Noah are now encyclopedic, and students and scholars continue debating the various biblical and historical issues involved. ABR affirms the extraordinary value of the study of ancient Near Eastern (ANE) literature, as many limited but important insights can be gleaned from such scholarly investigation. In fact, evangelical scholarship should lead the way in such efforts, as those properly ensconced upon the bedrock foundation of truth that is composed of “every word that comes from the mouth of God” (Mt 4:4). Such a sure and immovable foundation is what Jesus, without equivocation, calls all His disciples to stand upon (Mt 7:24–27). Thus, the inspired text of Scripture, by which the Holy Spirit instructs, convicts, and edifies, has the clarity (perspicuity), sufficiency, and power to accomplish His purposes in the hearts and lives of human beings in all places and at all times. This foundation is our starting point when evaluating the myths and lore of ANE literature.

The Atrahasis Epic asserts that after the creation of man, the world became overpopulated, and, according to the text, *this* was the great existential threat for which the gods sought various remedies (drought, famine, etc.), which culminated in a catastrophic flood. The gods believed that certain human personal afflictions like barrenness, miscarriages, and general infant mortality were necessary and needed (but were not sufficiently present and active) to maintain order on the earth. Thus, the flood came about to remedy uncontrolled overpopulation caused by man upon the earth, according to this imaginative story.

The Genesis flood account, however, reveals the historic cataclysm from a completely different worldview perspective: the essential issue is that “the intention of man’s heart is evil from his

youth” (Gn 8:21). Indeed, the early chapters of Genesis provide the account of Cain and Abel and the account of Lamech. These narratives are examples of how mankind had polluted the earth by murder, the shedding of innocent blood—and, moreover, the blood of those who were made in God’s own image. And we should all be reminded of the Lord’s outrage when he said to Cain, “What have you done? *The voice of your brother’s blood is crying to me from the ground*” (Gn 4:10). It is this reality that brought a real flood upon the real earth in space and time.

### Key Apologetic Questions: Defining *Hamas*

If the Flood was sent to punish human beings for their sins, why did God completely devastate the created earth and destroy all the air-breathing animals as well? Is there something more going on here than just the punishment of sinful human beings? We should also ask a very serious apologetic question that comes forth from Genesis 8:21. The text says, “...the Lord said in his heart, ‘I will never again curse the ground because of man, for the intention of man’s heart is evil from his youth. Neither will I ever again strike down every living creature as I have done.’” But if God decided that He would never again curse the ground and strike down every living creature, why did He choose this course of action through the global Flood in the first place?

Genesis chapter 6 can help us answer these questions. And it is also in this crucial chapter that we become aware of the meaning of the Hebrew word *hamas*. Dr. Tikva Frymer-Kensky provides an excellent overview of this matter in the following extensive quotation from her article entitled “The Atrahasis Epic and Its Significance for Our Understanding of Genesis 1-9”:

By the generation of the flood the whole earth has become polluted, (KJV “the earth also was corrupt”) and is filled with *ḥāmās* (Gen 6:11). The wide range of meanings of the word *ḥāmās* in the Bible encompasses almost the entire spectrum of evil. The term can stand for evil of any sort (Ps 11:5; Prov 13:2); it may simply stand for falsehood, as in *’ed ḥāmās* “false witness” (Exod 23:1; Deut 19:15; Ps 35:1) and its occurrence with *mirmā* [fraud] (Isa 60:18; Jer 6:7, 20:8), with the two together meaning something like “plunder and pillage.” *Ḥāmās* has a very close connection to *dāmīm* “bloodshed,” as can be seen from Ezek 9:9. Like *dāmīm*, the term *ḥāmās* can be used in a physical way, for *ḥāmās* (or the pollution from it) can cover clothes (Mal 2:16) and hands (Job 16:17; 1 Chron 12:17). In Genesis, the earth is filled with *ḥāmās* and has itself become polluted because all flesh had polluted its way upon the earth (Gen 6:11-12). It is the filling of the earth with *ḥāmās* and its resultant



# *I have set My bow in the cloud,*

and it shall be a sign of the covenant between Me and the earth....  
And the waters shall never again become a flood to destroy all flesh.

GENESIS 9:13, 9:15B

pollution that prompts God to bring a flood to physically erase everything from the earth and start anew.\*

Even when considering the worldwide flood sent by God, we may still fail to see the factors requiring such a catastrophe. Due to decades (even centuries) of evangelical preaching and writing, believers have been conditioned to see their sins as an immanently personal matter and only secondarily as affecting others (even when sinful actions directly harm others!). Our privatized spirituality has led to a “me-and-Jesus against the world” mentality. The biblical picture, however, is radically different. Indeed, the Old Testament Scriptures make it clear that sin, and particularly serious moral sin, brought pollution *to the land*. In the act of murder, the blood of the victim cried forth from the ground, providing the essential background for and meaning of the term “bloodguilt,” a term pointing not only to the present sinful condition of the murderer but also to the pollution of the land itself. The flood of Noah was the cleansing judgment to remove generations of moral contamination caused by the egregious sins of idolatry, murder, and sexual abomination—pollution that brought about an ontological transformation to the earth. With no Law governing the earth, God decided to start afresh, and when Noah and his family stepped out of the ark, God provided clear, absolute rules that were to be applied in human governance upon the whole earth.

And God blessed Noah and his sons and said to them, “Be fruitful and multiply and fill the earth. The fear of you and the dread of you shall be upon every beast of the earth and upon every bird of the heavens, upon everything that creeps on the ground and all the fish of the sea. Into your hand they are delivered. Every moving thing that lives shall be food for you. And as I gave you the green plants, I give you everything. But you shall not eat flesh with its life, that is, its blood. And for your lifeblood I will require a reckoning: from every beast I will require it and from man. From his fellow man I will require a reckoning for the life of man.

“Whoever sheds the blood of man,  
by man shall his blood be shed,  
for God made man in his own image.” (Gn 9:1–6)

These explicit standards were now to govern human existence upon the earth. Later, when the Law of Moses is delivered to the Israelites, a more complete enumeration of God’s requirements is given to His chosen people. Moving forward through the generations and down to our own day, we see how government has been given by God to restrain, discipline, and punish sinful human behavior. But God will never again cleanse the earth by a flood.

And God said, “*This is the sign of the covenant that I make between me and you and every living creature that is with you, for all future generations: I have set my bow in the cloud, and it shall be a sign of the covenant between me and the earth.... And the waters shall never again become a flood to destroy all flesh.*” (Gn 9:12–13, 9:15b)

## **New Testament Affirmation**

Should it be any surprise that in the New Testament period, when the Jerusalem Council met as recorded in Acts 15, there was a recognition of these matters that led the apostle James to declare, “Therefore my judgment is that we should not trouble those of the Gentiles who turn to God [with the requirement of circumcision], but should write to them *to abstain from the things polluted by idols, and from sexual immorality, and from what has been strangled, and from blood.* For from ancient generations Moses has had in every city those who proclaim him, for he is read every Sabbath in the synagogues” (vv. 20–21)? There is more involved in this particular passage of Scripture than I can unfold here, but nonetheless, it is important to note the evidence in biblical revelation of the congruence of the nature and description of the demands that God requires of all human beings down through the ages. This was true so much the more for those coming to faith in Jesus Christ from among the Gentiles at the outset of the church and in its early formation. Those among the nations who defy their Creator through acts of murder, idolatry, and sexual impurity bring judgment upon themselves from the Throne of God, not just from the authority of human government. From the moment Noah stepped forth from the ark to the present day, God remains the Great Governor of all, and Jesus Christ the head of His holy church.

It should make us tremble to know that God will act to enforce the holy standards He has appointed for the good earth He created. He may never again send a flood to cleanse the earth of the *hamas* that human beings bring, but in the same way that He governs and orders the very courts of heaven, He will act in our generation, first to cleanse the church, which is Christ’s body, and then to execute holy judgments among the nations. The One who raises up nations and brings them down will ensure that His purposes are fulfilled. In this light, may we see with fresh eyes the prayer that Jesus taught His disciples in Matthew 6:9–13, as we ask our Father to “hallow” His name in bringing about His will on earth: “Our Father in heaven, hallowed be your name. Your kingdom come, your will be done, on earth as it is in heaven. Give us this day our daily bread, and forgive us our debts, as we also have forgiven our debtors. And lead us not into temptation, but deliver us from evil.”

\* Tikva Frymer-Kensky, “The Atrahasis Epic and Its Significance for Our Understanding of Genesis 1–9,” *Biblical Archaeologist* 40, no. 4 (December 1977): 153.