

## God, Noah, the Sixth Mass Extinction, and Us

The story of Noah and the Great Flood is found beginning in the sixth chapter of Genesis. Most preachers and theologians have glossed over how the story begins: “The LORD saw that the wickedness of humankind was great in the earth . . . And the LORD was sorry that he had made humankind on the earth, and it grieved him to his heart.”

Some translations say that the LORD “regretted” making humankind. The King James Version actually used the word “repented.”

The implication is clear: God did not know that things would go so badly. God did not realize that “he” was making what turned out to be a huge mistake.

So how come most traditional theology has long insisted that God is omniscient, knowing everything, past, present, and future? Some recent theology has revised its thinking to claim that God knows all that has been, and all that now is, but not all that will be. Fair enough, but that requires fundamental re-thinking of the nature of God. In particular, it requires abandonment of the notion of God as an eternal, unchanging Being.

I’ll skip the theological details and get to the chase. If God does not know the future, if God does not know how certain things – including especially important things like the creation of humankind – will turn out, then there is no guarantee they will turn out well.

I hardly regard the Bible as an infallible commentary on the state of all things human and divine. But I do think that anyone who takes the Bible seriously, as I do, should not ascribe to doctrines and teachings that are obviously contrary to biblical understandings – unless there is good reason and solid evidence for believing otherwise instead.

There is now good reason, biblically and otherwise, for all Christians (as well as all other religious believers) to think about God’s creation as a grand experiment. By definition, no one – not even God – knows how experiments will turn out. Even God’s best intentions cannot guarantee a favorable outcome, either from God’s perspective or from the perspective of the creatures whom God has brought into being. Colossal failure is a real possibility!

To be more specific, life on planet Earth, the only life we currently know, may not continue indefinitely. We already know we are facing a major extinction period when great numbers of species will die. We also know that time is short for us human beings to get our act together or human civilization will likely perish. It seems quite unlikely that human beings can colonize any other planet without continued life support from planet Earth. And even if that becomes possible, would we really want our species to be reduced to that remnant of human society that is prepared to abandon the rest of us to oblivion?

I’m inclined to believe there must be intelligent life elsewhere in the universe. Surely God’s eggs are not all in the Earth basket. But little good that does us. I’m also inclined to believe that any intelligent life we might encounter from elsewhere in the universe is likely to have survived its

own moral and intellectual infancy. It is likely to have evolved to a higher level of spiritual and ethical awareness than we human beings have yet to attain.

Indeed, I know people who believe that such life already dwells among us. Given what I have and have not seen, I'm unable to share their conviction. But I'm not beyond hoping these people are right. God knows, we need all the help we can get. Regardless, our deliverance now requires full-scale transformation.

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