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McKeown, the Theme of Land, *IBS* 19, April 1997  
**THE THEME OF LAND IN GENESIS 1-11 AND ITS  
SIGNIFICANCE FOR THE ABRAHAM NARRATIVE.**

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Abstract

Four main punishments described in the early chapters of Genesis affect the relationship between human beings and the land on which they live. Sins as diverse as eating 'forbidden' fruit, murdering a brother and building a tower are all punished in relation to land. Why should this be? The answer becomes obvious when we examine the way in which land is presented in Genesis.

An understanding of the relations between human beings and the land in Genesis 1-11 is a guide to understanding the role of land in the Abraham narrative. The movement in the primeval narrative is from the ideal surroundings in Eden, where land, God and humankind have a harmonious relationship, towards ever increasing hostility until the humans are scattered over all the earth. The movement of humankind further and further from the ideal land in Eden is seen as a consequence of the progressive deterioration of their relationship with God. In the Abraham narrative, on the other hand, the relationship with God becomes progressively closer and the promises of land become more explicit.

This paper focuses on the subject of land<sup>1</sup> in Genesis. Attention is drawn to the role played by land in the primeval narrative (1-11) and, in particular, to the special tripartite relationship between God, human beings, and land. I argue that the theme of land is developed in these early chapters in a way that provides a

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<sup>1</sup> The main Hebrew words concerned with 'land' in Genesis are ארץ and אדמה and שדה. Although the terms are often used synonymously, each has its own distinctiveness. ארץ occasionally denotes 'ground' (18:2) but usually refers to large stretches of territory such as a particular land or country (e.g., 12:1, 5; 17:8; 21:34), or to the earth as a whole (e.g., 1:1, 2; 2:1, 4, 5; 6:4; 11:1); אדמה is used a few times to denote the habitable earth (12:3) or a particular country (12:3; 47:20), but in most occurrences the reference is to the 'soil' or the 'ground' (2:5, 7, 19; 3:17, 19, 23; 4:2, 3, 10). שדה occasionally denotes a particular country (14:7) or cultivated land (37:7). More often, however, it refers to wide open spaces where wild animals roam (2:19, 20; 3:1, 14; 25:27, 29). שדה is also used in relation to the land that Abraham bought from the Hittites (23:8-20).

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foundation for the understanding of the same theme in the patriarchal narratives. The study of the patriarchal narratives will be limited to the Abraham Cycle (12-25) because of restrictions on length.

### **Land has a higher rank and status than air or water**

In the creation narratives, land has a more significant role than air or water. The special status of land can be seen in the different way in which the creation of birds and fish is described compared to the account of the creation of the land animals. The relevant texts are as follows:

#### Birds and Sea-creatures

וַיֹּאמֶר אֱלֹהִים יִשְׂרָצוּ הַטִּיּוֹם שָׂרֵץ נֶפֶשׁ חַיָּה  
עוֹף יְעוֹפֵף עַל-הָאָרֶץ עַל-פְּנֵי רְקִיעַ הַשָּׁמַיִם:

And God said, 'Let the earth bring forth living creatures according to their kinds: cattle and creeping things and beasts of the earth according to their kinds.' And it was so (RSV Gen 1:24).

#### Animals

Genesis 1:24

וַיֹּאמֶר אֱלֹהִים תּוֹצֵא הָאָרֶץ נֶפֶשׁ חַיָּה לְמִינָהּ  
בְּהֵמָה וְרֶמֶשׂ וְחַיְתוֹ-אָרֶץ לְמִינָהּ וְיִהְיֶה-כֵן:

And God said, "Let the earth bring forth living creatures according to their kinds: cattle and creeping things and beasts of the earth according to their kinds." And it was so. (RSV Gen 1:24).

Although the RSV translation is similar, the use of the verb יצא in 1:24 suggests a creative role for the earth. The earth has already 'brought forth' (hiphil of יצא) grass (1:12) and the use of the same verb again in the context of the creation of the animals highlights the creative power imparted to the ground by the creator.<sup>2</sup> The

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<sup>2</sup> Thus J. Skinner, referring to the animals, writes: 'Like the plants (v. 12) they are boldly said to be produced by the earth, their bodies being part of the earth's substance (2:7,19); this could not be said of the fish in relation to the water, and hence a different form of expression had to be employed in v. 20'. *A Critical and Exegetical Commentary on Genesis* (ICC 2nd ed Edinburgh: Clarke 1930)29.

McKeown, **the Theme of Land**, *IBS* 19, April 1997 waters, on the other hand, should 'swarm with fish' while the birds should 'fly above the earth'.<sup>3</sup> While this does not rule out completely a creative role for the waters or the air, it is the creative role of the earth that is emphasised.

### **This high-ranking land is uniquely related to humans**

Although there is probably no etymological link between אדם and אדמה,<sup>4</sup> the close relationship between human beings and the ground is emphasised by this word play. This unflattering assertion, that man is basically dust, elevates the ground while reminding the human beings of their inherent vulnerability; not only do they come from the ground but when they die they return to the ground as mere dust (3:19). As products of the ground, the humans are closely related to it; this renders them uniquely suited to care for the ground and to reap its benefits (2:16), but it also means that anything adverse that affects the ground/land strikes deeply at the very basis of their existence. To disrupt or affect the human relationship with the land is, therefore, an effective way of punishing people severely.

There is an interesting pattern of interdependence; the land depends on God for water and continued fertility; humankind depends on God for its breath and continued existence; the land needs humankind to work it and, in turn, the land is essential as the provider of food for the human beings.

### **The souring of relations between humankind, God and the land!**

Relationships in Eden are ideal but this soon changes! When the relationship between humankind and God deteriorates there are significant repercussions for the relations between human beings and the land. Four main punishments described in the primeval narratives affect the relationship between human beings and the land on which they live. Punishments as diverse as, eating

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<sup>3</sup> Furthermore, in 2:19 it is asserted that both animals and birds have been made from the ground.

<sup>4</sup> See F. Maass, 'אדם' in TDOT vol 1 1974.

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'forbidden' fruit, murdering a brother and building a tower, are all punished in relation to land. The punishment of Adam (3:17-19), Cain (4:10-16), Noah's contemporaries (6:5-8) and the tower builders (11:5-9), are all in some way related to land.

### **i. The Punishment of Adam (3:1-24)**

When Adam rebels against God he adversely affects his relationship with the ground which is cursed because of his rebellion (3:17-19). Although there is no indication that Adam himself is cursed, a curse on the ground comes close to being a curse on him since, as we have already seen, he originated from the ground (2:7; cf. 3:19). In practical terms the cursing of the ground means a loss of fertility and the growth of thorns and thistles.<sup>5</sup> The human beings will be forced to eat 'the plants of the field'<sup>6</sup> until they return to the dust (3:18-19). The ground from which Adam is formed will eventually claim him again, but until then he will experience life as a struggle with the soil.<sup>7</sup> This means that 'man in his own disorder would never now 'subdue' the earth'.<sup>8</sup> Adam must still work the soil but the benefits he receives are greatly reduced (3:19, 23).

Following the cursing of the ground there was one further consequence of sin. This was the expulsion of human beings from the Garden of Eden. This is presented as a necessary precaution to prevent them from eating fruit from the Tree of Life. The significance of the expulsion is that the security provided by the Garden of Eden has been removed. God exercises his authority as landlord and expels humans from the very secure and fertile piece of land in which he had placed them earlier. God, 'like a landlord dissatisfied with his tenants, evicts them, not from the earth

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<sup>5</sup> G.J. Wenham comments, 'Land blessed by God is well-watered and fertile (Deut 33:13-16; cf. Gen 2:8-14), so that when cursed it lacks such benefits' (*Genesis 1-15* [Word Biblical Commentary, Texas: Word Books, 1987] 82).

<sup>6</sup> Wenham suggests that *הַיְצֵבִתִּים הַשָּׂדֵה* 'probably covers both wild and cultivated plants in contrast to the fruit-bearing trees of the garden' (ibid).

<sup>7</sup> See G. von Rad, *Genesis* (London: SCM Press, 1972) 94

<sup>8</sup> D. Kidner, *Genesis* (TOTC, London: Tyndale Press, 1967) 72.

McKeown, **the Theme of Land**, *IBS* 19, April 1997 completely but from the particular parcel of land on which they rebelled'.<sup>9</sup>

So then, in chapters 1-3, the theme of land is developed in a way that shows the close relationship between humankind and land. The land is given by God and human beings are responsible for its maintenance. Land provides food for God's creatures and represents protection and security. The behaviour of human beings affects their relationship with the land and their rebellion against God results in alienation from the ground/land and, ultimately, expulsion from Eden.

## ii. The Punishment of Cain

The second punishment which relates to land is directed towards Cain (4:1-16). Cain is עֹבֵד אֲדָמָה a tiller of the ground' (4:2). When Cain's offering of produce from the ground fails to gain him favour with God (4:5), he reacts violently against his brother and kills him (4:8).

Although we would not normally link this crime with the ground, this connection is made in the Cain/Abel narrative; the ground opens its mouth to receive the victim's blood (4:10). Cain is punished accordingly (4:11-12).

And now you are cursed from the ground, which has opened its mouth to receive your brother's blood from your hand. When you till the ground, it shall no longer yield to you its strength; you shall be a fugitive and a wanderer on the earth.

Genesis 4: 11-12

וַעֲתָה אָרִיר אֶתָּה מִן־הָאֲדָמָה אֲשֶׁר פָּצְתָה  
אֶת־פִּיהָ לְקַחַת אֶת־דַּמִּי אֶחָיִךְ מִיָּדְךָ׃  
כִּי תַעֲבֹד אֶת־הָאֲדָמָה לֹא־תִסַּף לָתֵת־כֹּחָהּ לָךְ  
נָע וְנָד תֵּהְיֶה בָאָרֶץ׃

Cain is cursed מִן־הָאֲדָמָה (4:11).<sup>10</sup> This means either that he was cursed more than the ground or that he would be cursed 'away from

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<sup>9</sup> Cf. J. McKeown, *A Study of the Main Unifying Themes in the Book of Genesis*, unpublished Ph. D. Thesis, The Queens University of Belfast, 1991.

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the ground'. The latter translation seems the more likely and is supported by most modern commentators.<sup>11</sup> This raises the question about what is meant by being cursed 'away from the ground'. The relevant passage is Gen 4:12.

כִּי תַעֲבֹד אֶת־הָאֲדָמָה לֹא־תִסַּף תַּח־כַּחֲהָ לָךְ  
נָע וְנָד תִּהְיֶה בְּאֲרָץ:

When you till the ground, it shall no longer yield to you its strength; you shall be a fugitive and a wanderer on the earth (RSV Gen 4:12).

Cain's punishment is that the ground which he once tilled successfully would now become infertile forcing him to wander in search of food. Clearly the punishment is alienation from the ground resulting in lack of fertility or, in other words, famine. This is significant since it is a clear indication that famine in Genesis, may be understood as a sign of God's disapproval. The implication of Cain's punishment is that there is no one piece of land that will provide all the food he needs. As a wanderer he loses the security that a carefully defined piece of land represents. He himself recognises how vulnerable he has become. This is why he complains

יֵאמֹר כֵּן אֶל־יְהוָה גָּדוֹל עֲוֹנִי מִנְשָׂא:  
הֵן גָּרַשְׁתָּ אֹתִי הַיּוֹם מֵעַל פְּנֵי הָאֲדָמָה  
וּמִפְּנֵיךָ אֶסְתַּר וְהִיִּיתִי נָע וְנָד בְּאֲרָץ וְהָיָה  
כֹּל־מֹצְאֵי יַהֲרֹגֵנִי:

Cain said to the Lord, "My punishment is greater than I can bear. Behold, thou hast driven me this day away from the ground; and from thy face I shall be hidden; and I shall be a fugitive and a wanderer on the earth, and whoever finds me will slay me" (RSV Gen 4:13-14).

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<sup>10</sup> As O. Procksch points out, 'Kain selbst ist der erste verfluchte Mensch, während sein Vater nur dem Acker Fluch zuzieht,' *Die Genesis* (2nd ed. Leipzig: Deicherische Verlags-buchhandlung, 1924)48.

<sup>11</sup> See e.g., Dillmann, *Genesis* (Edinburgh: Clarke, 1897, trans W. B. Stevenson from *Die Genesis*, 3rd ed. Leipzig, 1886)191, Skinner (op. cit.)108, von Rad (op. cit.)106, Westermann (*Genesis 1-11*, London: SPCK, 1984, trans J. J. Scullion, *Biblicher Kommentar*, Neukirchen: Neukirchener Verlag) 307, Wenham (op. cit.)107.

The complaint that 'whoever finds me will slay me' must be understood in the context of Cain being driven away from the ground. The loss of fertile land makes Cain feel insecure and vulnerable. Furthermore, being separated from land is concomitant with being separated from God and Cain is found living in the land of Nod east of Eden 'presumably even farther from the garden of "delight" from which his parents had been expelled'.<sup>12</sup>

It is interesting at this stage to compare the punishment inflicted on Adam. The curse renders the ground difficult for Adam to cultivate but labour and toil would succeed in producing something from the ground (3:19). In contrast, Cain will be plagued by famine wherever he tries to settle and he will be continually the loser in his struggle with the recalcitrant earth which is now alienated from him.

Cain's sin, the first murder, represents a deterioration in the relationship between human beings and God and consequently his punishment is more severe; his relationship with the ground suffers even greater alienation than that experienced by Adam (4:11-12; cf. 3:17-19). As Von Rad comments,

Cain is banished from the soil . . . the earth itself is to deny him the power of blessing. The punishment goes far beyond that inflicted in 3:17ff. The relationship of the fratricide to the mother earth is disturbed much more deeply. It is so shattered, in fact, that the earth has no home for him.<sup>13</sup>

Through both of these punishments (Adam and Cain) the vulnerability of humankind's relationship to the ground is emphasised (3:17-19; cf. 4:10-12). Furthermore, the narrator is establishing a principle that the earth and all its land belong to the creator who has given human beings authority and responsibility over the created order (1:1-2:9). Failure to treat the land properly,

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<sup>12</sup> Wenham *op. cit.*, 110.

<sup>13</sup> Von Rad, *op. cit.*, 106.



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either eating forbidden fruit (3:6-19), or forcing the land to drink the blood of a brother (4:8-12), affects the relationship between humans and the soil, a relationship which is presented in Genesis as of fundamental importance. The role of God in this episode is consistent with the role of 'supreme landlord.' God supervises those who occupy the earth he has made. Those living on the earth who do not behave in a worthy manner find the benefits that they receive from the land greatly restricted or removed completely.

### iii. The flood as punishment (6:1-9:29)

It is quite remarkable that throughout the flood narrative a close connection is maintained between the land/ground and sin. This connection is emphasised by the frequent use of the words אֲדָמָה and אֶרֶץ, which occur over 40 times in chapters 6-8.<sup>14</sup> It is true, of course, that a story dealing with a flood will necessitate some mention of the earth/land. However, comparisons between the Genesis narrative and the Atrahasis story show that the earth/land motive is much more prominent in Genesis than the story of a flood normally warrants. In Atrahasis 3:1:1-3:6:50, earth/land is mentioned only three times against over 40 times in the Genesis flood story (6:9-9:11).

The close connection between sin, the land and the flood is emphasised by a very powerful wordplay using the root שָׁחַת (6:11-13).

וַתִּשְׁחַת הָאָרֶץ לְפָנַי הָאֱלֹהִים וַתִּמָּלֵא הָאָרֶץ  
חֲמָס׃  
וַיִּרְא אֱלֹהִים אֶת-הָאָרֶץ וְהִנֵּה נִשְׁחָתָה כִּי-הִשְׁחִית  
כָּל-בָּשָׂר אֶת-דְּרָכָו עַל-הָאָרֶץ׃  
וַיֹּאמֶר אֱלֹהִים לְנֹחַ קַן כָּל-בָּשָׂר בָּא לְפָנַי  
כִּי-מָלְאָה הָאָרֶץ חֲמָס מִפְּנֵיהֶם וְהִגַּנִּי מִשְׁחִיתָם׃

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<sup>14</sup> Actually, the word אֶרֶץ occurs 40 times in the passage commencing with the announcement of the Toledoth of Noah and ending with the declaration that the earth would not be destroyed again by a flood (6:9-9:11). It would be precarious to postulate that this is deliberate without a clear indication of what the number 40 is intended to symbolise in this context. However, this large number of occurrences of land is, undoubtedly, significant.

אֶת־הָאָרֶץ׃

Now the earth was corrupt in God's sight, and the earth was filled with violence. And God saw the earth, and behold, it was corrupt; for all flesh had corrupted their way upon the earth. And God said to Noah, 'I have determined to make an end of all flesh; for the earth is filled with violence through them; behold, I will destroy them with the earth' (RSV Gen 6:11-13).

Thus the root **שחח** is used in three ways in verses 11-13; it describes: the action of the human beings, the state of the earth as a result of sin, and the action which God takes against humankind. Human beings have brought God's earth into a state of **שחח** and now God brings judgement in terms of **שחח** upon them, which means, in effect, that he destroys them. Furthermore, as Kidner points out, this use of the word **שחח** 'makes it plain that what God decided to "destroy" (13) had been virtually self-destroyed already'.<sup>15</sup>

The way in which the ground has been polluted is discussed by Frymer-Kensky. She argues that the contamination of the ground has been occasioned by the shedding of innocent blood.

The most serious contaminant of the land is the blood of those who have been murdered: the concept of 'blood-guilt' is well-known in Israelite law. Because of the seriousness of the crime of murder, and perhaps also because of the mystical conception of blood in Israelite thought, the blood of the slain physically pollutes the land.<sup>16</sup>

This interpretation links the flood story very closely with the Cain/Abel story suggesting that in both stories the main crime is the shedding of blood with the consequent contamination of the ground. In 6:11 the crimes of the human beings are all grouped under the general heading of **חמס** (violence) which includes murder together with other forms of violence. The behaviour of the

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<sup>15</sup> Kidner, *op. cit.*, 87.

<sup>16</sup> T. Frymer-Kensky, 'The Atrahasis Epic and its Significance for our Understanding of Genesis 1-9', *BA* 40 (1977)154.

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human beings, as in the earlier stories of Adam and Cain, affects the ground on which they live and contaminates it. The laws that are given after the flood are clearly intended to prevent further contamination of the ground (9:1-7).<sup>17</sup> As is also demonstrated in the Garden of Eden story, God reserves the right to act against people who mistreat the earth/land which he has provided for them (4:10). God decides to destroy humankind (17) but as a result the earth loses its value as a life-supporting medium and is itself destroyed. Therefore, the behaviour of human beings has repercussions, not only for their own welfare, but also for the welfare of their land.

The turning point in the flood story is reached with the words 'God remembered Noah'. Now the process of re-creation begins. A wind commissioned by God blows over the earth and the waters begin to subside (8:1; cf. 1:2). Mountains reappear (8:5), the earth begins to dry up and the refugees on board the ark can leave and multiply on the dry land, which is now restored to them (8:15-19). This process resembles the original creation of the earth (1:1-13).

The evacuation of the ark and the occupation of the new earth is described in terms that emphasise the activity of God and the passivity of man.<sup>18</sup> Those on board disembark only after they receive a direct command from God (8:15-19). Included in this divine command is the invitation to all the living creatures to multiply and replenish the earth. In this sense it is stressed that the new earth is not something that man can rush out of the ark and grasp for himself. The new earth is given by God. As von Rad writes,

God's detailed command to leave the ark is issued to all its inhabitants. Human arbitrariness, therefore, could not seize the fresh earth, newly liberated from chaos; God himself liberated the earth for the survivors. After the judgement of the Flood, man on his own could not say as a matter of course, that the earth was

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<sup>17</sup> See T. Frymer Kensky, 'What the Babylonian Flood Stories Can and Cannot Teach us about the Genesis Flood' *BAR* 4 (1978)38.

<sup>18</sup> Dillmann, *op. cit.*, 288.

McKeown, **the Theme of Land**, *IBS* 19, April 1997 man's domain. It was, therefore, an important matter for the faith of those who came later, a matter about which they had to be sure, that the entrance into the new time, on to the new earth, did not arise from human initiative, but from God's express will.<sup>19</sup>

Thus, the authority of the Divine Landlord over the new earth and its inhabitants is firmly established. Following the flood a brief divine pronouncement is made in response to Noah's sacrifices. Again the focus of attention is the earth. God promises that he will never again curse (קלל) the ground as he had done in bringing the flood (8:21).<sup>20</sup>

וַיִּרַח יְהוָה אֶת־רִיחַ הַנְּיחֹחַ וַיֹּאמֶר יְהוָה אֶל־לִבּוֹ  
 לֹא־אֶסְףּ לְקַלֵּל עוֹד אֶת־הָאָרֶץ כִּעֲבוּר הָאָדָם  
 כִּי יֵצֵד לֵב הָאָדָם רַע מִנְּעֻרָיו וְלֹא־אֶסְףּ עוֹד  
 לְהַכּוֹת אֶת־כָּל־חַי פֶּאֶשֶׁר עָשִׂיתִי:

And when the Lord smelled the pleasing odour, the Lord said in his heart, 'I will never again curse the ground because of man, for the imagination of man's heart is evil from his youth; neither will I ever again destroy every living creature as I have done' (RSV Gen 8:21).

The assurance that God, 'will never again curse the ground', does not cancel the original curse in 3:17.<sup>21</sup> Rather, God promises that there will be no further destruction of all living creatures by a flood. Concomitant with this assurance is the promise that the normal seasons will continue while earth remains (8:22).

עַד כָּל־יְמֵי הָאָרֶץ זֶרַע וְקִצִּיר וְקָר וְחֹם וְקָיִץ  
 וְחֹרֶף יוֹם וְלַיְלָה לֹא יִשְׁבְּחוּ:

<sup>19</sup> Von Rad, *op. cit.*, 129.

<sup>20</sup> Dillmann remarks that, 'God had not strictly cursed the earth in the case of the flood, as in chapter 3:17. The reference must therefore be to the declaration of the decree of extermination in 6:7,13 (*op. cit.*, 290). Wenham prefers to translate 8:21 as, 'I shall not curse the land again any further' and he comments, 'It is important to note the position of עוֹד in this sentence, coming after לְקַלֵּל to 'curse,' not after the parallel clause 'never again shall I smite.' This shows that God is not lifting the curse on the ground pronounced in 3:17 for man's disobedience, but promising not to add to it' (*op. cit.*, 190).

<sup>21</sup> The verb for 'to curse' in 3:17 is אָדָד but in 8:21 it is קָלַל.

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While the earth remains, seedtime and harvest, cold and heat, summer and winter, day and night, shall not cease (RSV Gen 8:22).

Thus the future of humankind is clearly linked with the future of the earth itself. The earth, as a whole, is portrayed as a gracious gift from the creator to people who are not worthy of it (8:21). The reader is reminded that the earth he lives on is still supporting life, not because the human beings do not deserve another flood, but because God has graciously decided not to send one.

To confirm these promises, God makes a covenant with Noah (9:1-17) in which the earth figures prominently (9:1, 7, 11, 13, 14, 16, 17)<sup>22</sup>; indeed the covenant with Noah is described by God in verse 13 as, the covenant ‘between me and the earth’

בְּרִית בֵּינִי וּבֵין הָאָרֶץ :

This emphasis on land in the flood narrative highlights the same ideas that have already been presented in the creation stories. We have observed in the creation narratives that human behaviour has a direct bearing on human relationships with the land. Adam’s initial rebellion against God leads to the ground being cursed as punishment (3:17-19) and as a further consequence he is expelled from Eden (3:23-24). Similarly in the Cain story, rebellion results in alienation from the land as well as from God (4:10-14). This same emphasis is found in the flood story. The behaviour of the human beings deteriorates, and, as a result, the earth is corrupted in God’s sight (6:11-12). God punishes man by removing him from the earth completely; only those in the ark survive (6:13-8:19). After the flood, the restored relationship between man and God is reflected in the success that Noah experiences when he tills the ground and enjoys its produce (8:20-9:20).

#### **iv. The Punishment of the Tower Builders**

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<sup>22</sup>As Frymer-Kensky has pointed out, the commands given in 9:1-7 are given to safeguard the future contamination of the ground. These laws prohibit the shedding of human blood in murder and the eating of blood (op. cit., 1978, 38).

God's role as creator and guardian of the earth is apparent again in the Babel narrative (11:1-9). The reader is alerted to the importance of the theme of ארץ (land/earth) in this passage by the six-fold repetition of the word in verses 1, 2, 4, 8, 9, 9.

This repetition suggests that the attitude of human beings to the earth is one of the main issues in the Babel story. The two-fold purpose in building the tower is to make a name for themselves and to avoid being scattered. These aims, as such, are not condemned and are similar to what is later promised to Abraham (Gen 12:1-3). The crime of the builders is to seek self-determination and to find security through land without acknowledging the appropriate authority - God! The divine landlord does not approve of what his tenants are doing, mainly because they fail to recognise his authority (11:6). He exercises his authority by withdrawing their ability to communicate. The end result is that the human beings, once secure in the confines of Eden, are now scattered over 'all the earth' (11:8).

### **Conclusions about the theme of land in Gen 1-11.**

We have seen, then, that land is of major concern in Gen 1-11. It is the special domain of the Creator who exercises authority and control over it. At the same time, there is an especially close relationship between humans and the land. Adam is formed from the ground and he is given responsibility over it. However because of their rebellious behaviour God punishes his human creatures in a way that adversely affects their relationship with the land. When God brings punishment, it is in his capacity as landlord, and all of the punitive measures that he adopts against the human beings are in some way related to the land. The following pattern is repeated: provision of land - stipulations to be obeyed - disobedience - expulsion. Adam is given the ground in Eden to till (2:15), is warned about the consequences of disobedience (2:16-17), but sins against God and is expelled (3:23-24). The land outside Eden is given to Adam and his offspring to till (3:23). Cain tills the ground (4:2), is warned by God to do well (4:7), but rebels and causes the ground to drink his brother's blood (4:11). Cain is

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then driven from the ground by famine and condemned to be a wanderer in search of food (4:11-12). Likewise in the flood narrative. The land belongs to God and he warns that his patience is not unlimited (6:3), but the human beings continue to fill the earth with violence (6:11-12). As a result, God wipes them off the face of the earth (7:23-24). In the Babel narrative people seek to exercise sovereignty over land and make themselves secure and powerful but the divine landlord shows his supreme authority by thwarting the human plans (11:1-9). As a result, the primeval narrative ends with human beings alienated from one another by language, alienated from God by their rebellion and lacking the security once afforded by the land in the garden of Eden.

James McKeown

(To be continued in next Issue)