

THE JEWISH FOUNDATIONS OF THE NEW TESTAMENT



Class VIII – Judaism through Jewish Eyes II

March 4, 2017

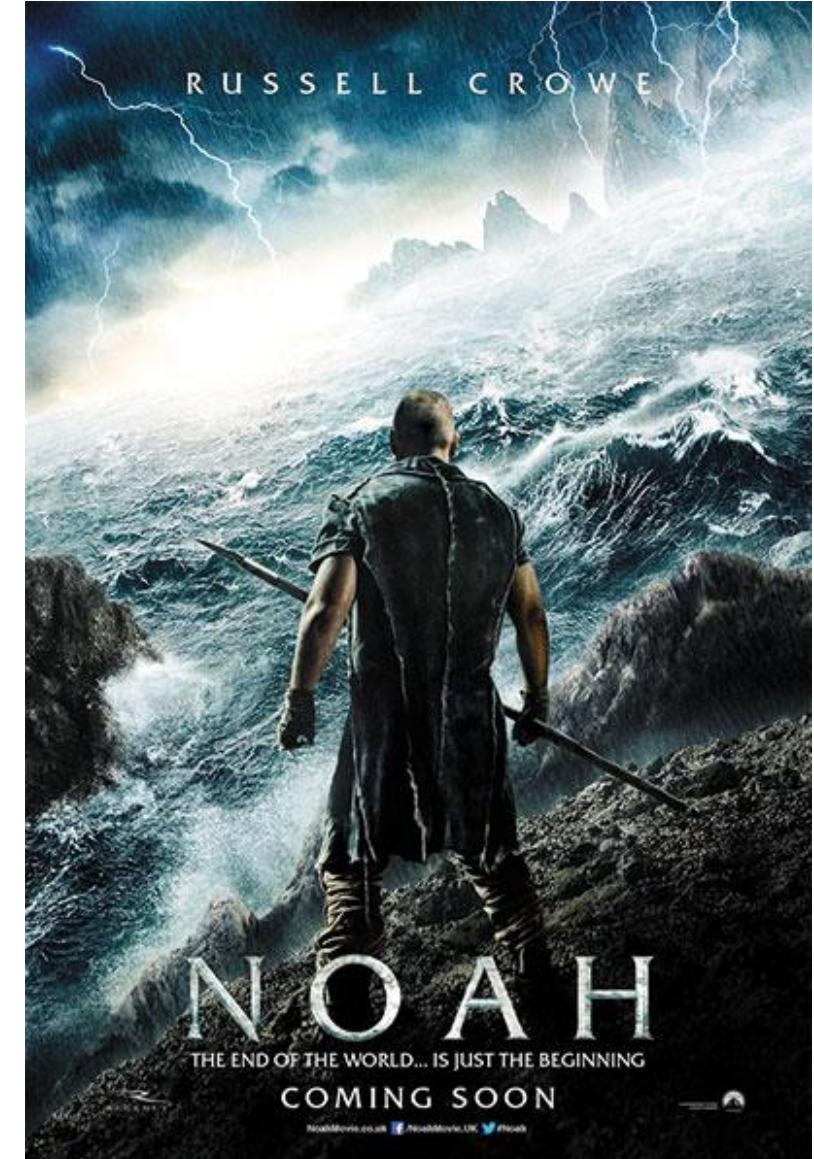
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An Introductory Reading

2 Peter 2:4-5, 9 –

“For if God did not spare angels when they sinned, but sent them to hell, putting them into gloomy dungeons to be held for judgment; if he did not spare the ancient world when he brought the flood on its ungodly people, but protected Noah, ***a preacher of righteousness (dikaiosunes keruka)***, and seven others...if this is so, then the Lord knows how to rescue godly people from trials and to hold the unrighteous for the day of judgment, while continuing their punishment.”



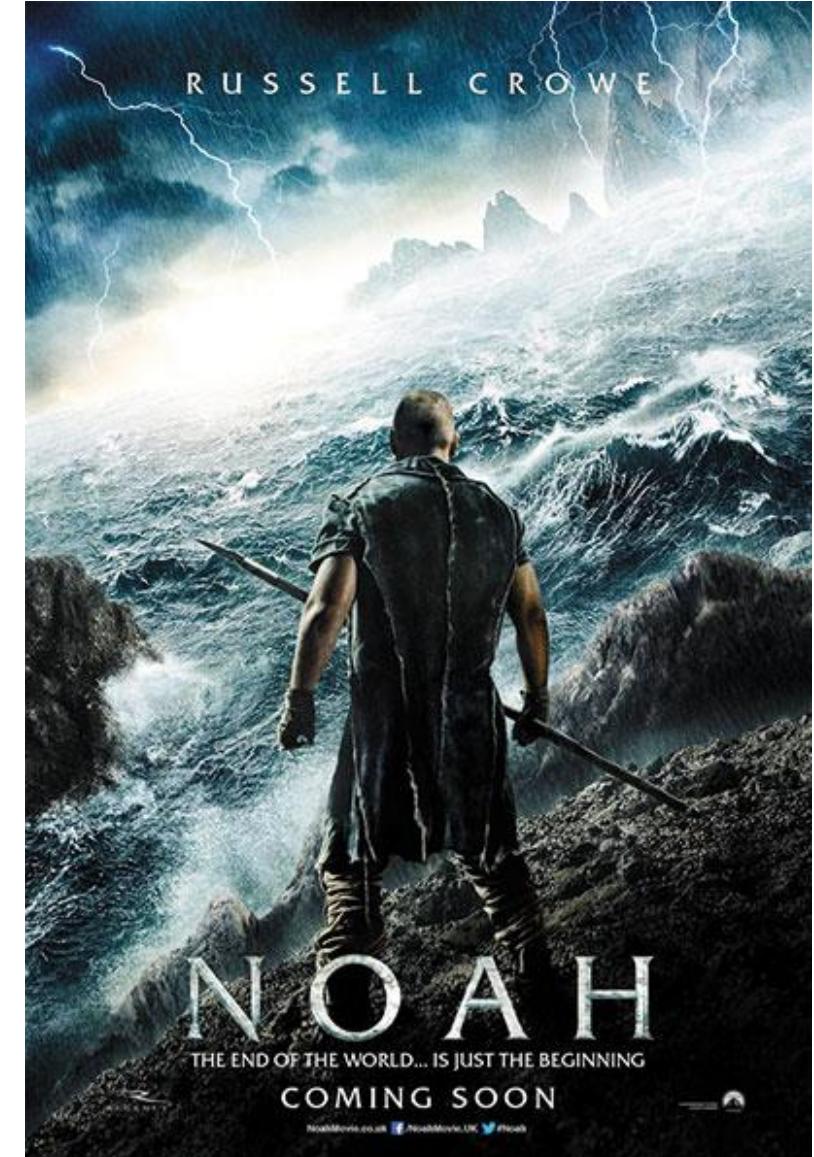
An Introductory Reading

1st Clement 7:5 - 6 (early 90's CE) –

“Let us review all the generations in turn, and learn how from generation to generation the Master has given a place for repentance to them that desire to turn to Him. **Noah preached repentance**, and they that obeyed were saved.”

Josephus in *Jewish Antiquities* 1.74-5 (late 1st c. CE) –

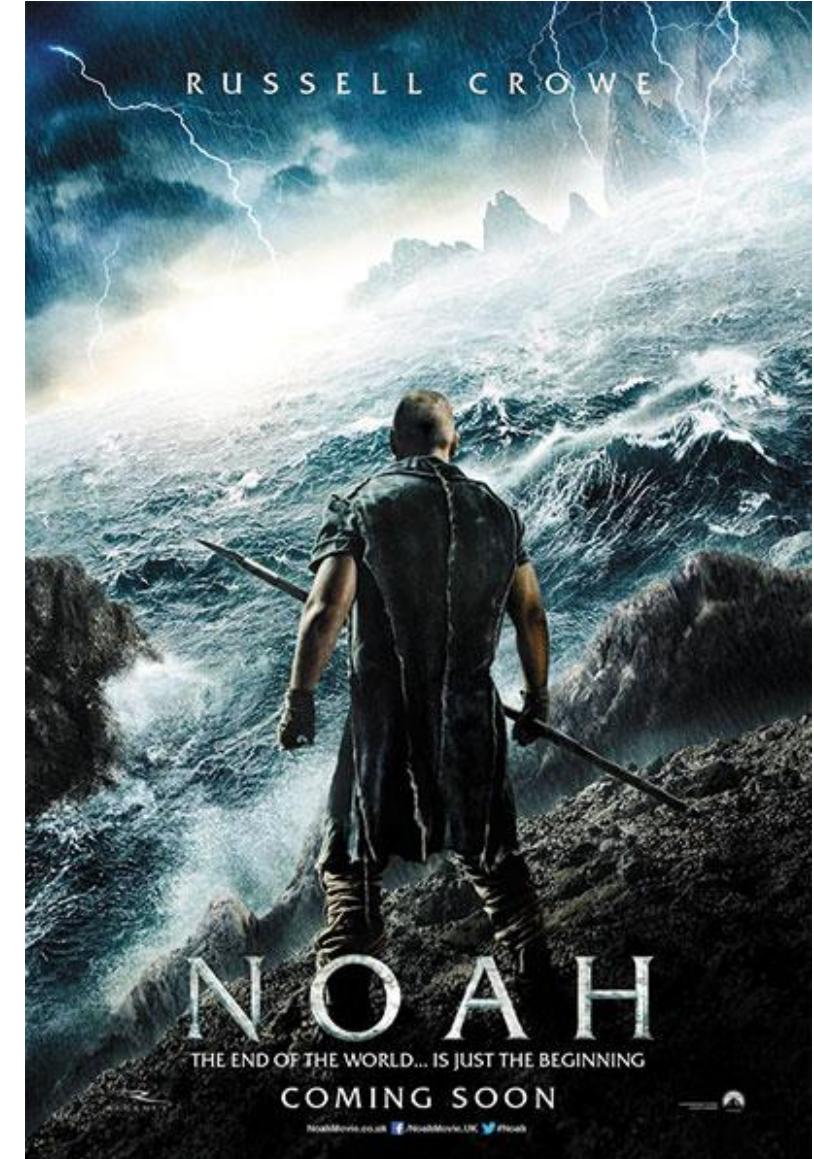
“But Noah, indignant at their conduct and viewing their counsels with displeasure, **urged them** to come to a better frame of mind and amend their ways.”



An Introductory Reading

Sibylline Oracles 1.148 - 56, 171 -72 (early 1st c. CE) –

“And then, having craftily devised all in turn, [Noah] entreated all the peoples and began to speak in words like these: ‘Men sated with faithlessness, smitten with great madness, **what you did will not escape the notice of God**, for he knows all things, the immortal savior, who oversees everything, who commanded me to announce to you, so that you may not be destroyed by your hearts. **Be sober, cut off evils, and stop fighting violently** with each other, having a bloodthirsty heart, drenching much earth with human blood’...When they heard him **they sneered at him**, each one, calling [Noah] demented, a man gone mad.”



Election and Covenant

- The Rabbis believed that the election of Abraham (and thereby the entire Jewish ethnic nation) was the foundation of their religion
- The existence of the relationship between Israel and *YHWH* is presupposed by all

“Beloved is Israel, for even though they are unclean **the Shekinah is among them**. And it also says: ‘Which **dwells (ha-shoken) with them** in the midst of their uncleanness (Lev. 16.16). And it says: ‘By making unclean my tabernacle which is in their midst’ (Lev. 15.31). And it says: ‘That they may not make unclean their camps in which **I dwell in the midst of you**’ (Num. 5.3). And it says: ‘You shall not make unclean the land in which you live, **in the midst of which I dwell** (*shoken*)’ (Num. 35.34).” - *Sifre Numbers*

“I am God for all those who come into the world, nevertheless **I have conferred My name particularly** on My people Israel.” - *Mekilta Mishpatim*

Election and Covenant

- The existence (and acceptance) of this fact of election meant Jews were called to a special type of relationship:

“And these words which I command you this day **shall be upon your heart** (Deut. 6.6).’ Rabbi says: Why is it said? Because it says (Deut. 6.5) ‘And thou shalt love the Lord thy God with all thy heart.’ **I do not know how one should love God** (*ha-Maqom*), and so Scripture says, ‘And these words which I command you this day shall be upon your heart.’ Place these words upon your heart so that **through them you will come to know the one who spoke and the world came into being**, and **cleave to his ways**.” - *Sifre Deuteronomy*

All Israelites have a share **in the world to come**, for it is written, ‘Thy people also shall be all righteous, they shall inherit the land forever; the branch of my planting, the work of my hands that I may be glorified” (Isa. 60:21). – *Sanhedrin 10.1*

Election and Covenant

- God's gracious acts preceded the obligations to follow Torah:

"I Am the Lord Thy God (Ex. 20:2). Why were the Ten Commandments not said at the beginning of the Torah? They give a parable. To what may this be compared? To the following: A king who entered a province said to the people: **May I be your king?** But the people said to him: **Have you done anything good for us that you should rule over us?** What did he do then? He built the city wall for them, he brought in the water supply for them, and he fought their battles. Then when he said to them: May I be your king? They said to him: Yes, yes. **Likewise, God.** He brought the Israelites out of Egypt, divided the sea for them, sent down the manna for them, brought up the well for them, brought the quails for them. He fought for them the battle with Amalek. Then He said to them: **I am to be your king. And they said to Him: Yes, yes.**"

"Likewise God said to Israel: 'I am the Lord thy God, thou shalt not have other gods – I am He whose reign you have taken upon yourselves in Egypt.' And when they said to Him: 'Yes, yes.' He continued: 'Now, **just as you accepted My reign, you must also accept My decrees:** "Thou shalt not have other gods before Me."'" - *Mekilta Bahodesh 5-6*

Election and Covenant

- The presence of these commandments/obligations was positive, not a burden:

“The Holy One, blessed is he, was minded to grant favor to Israel; therefore has he **multiplied** for them the Law and commandments, as it is written, ‘It pleased the Lord for his righteousness sake to **magnify the Law and make it honorable**’ (Isa. 42.21)” – *Makkoth 3.16*

- The intent was for Israel to act of worship with sincere devotion, not just obey to fulfill:

“If a man was reading in the Law and the time came to recite the *Shema*, **if he directed his heart** he has fulfilled his obligation; otherwise he has not fulfilled his obligation.” – *Berakoth 2.1*

“To love the Lord thy God.’ – Lest you should say, ‘I shall study Torah so that **I may be rich** and so that **I may be called Rabbi** and so that I may **receive a reward** in the world to come,’ Scripture says: ‘To love the Lord thy God.’ All that you do, **do only from love.**” – *Sifre Deuteronomy 48*

Election and Covenant

- The failure to faithfully observe the commandments is sin. For each of these transgressions God had appointed an appropriate way to show repentance:

"[If he said,] 'I swear that I will not eat! I swear that I will not eat it!' and he ate it, **he is liable only on one count**. Such is reckoned 'a rash oath,' for which a man is liable to Stripes if he uttered it **wantonly**, but, if **unwittingly**, to a Rising and Falling Offering." – *Shebuoth 3.7*

- There is no doctrine of "original sin" in Judaism – people do sin, but these are personal choices for which they are responsible, not innate in nature:

"Happy the man whose hour of death is like the hour of his birth; as at his birth he is free of sin, so at his death may he be free of sin." (p. *Berakoth 4d*)

Election and Covenant

- But sin has repercussions that affect those later (one of the consequences of the Garden of Eden was death, for example):

“There is no generation in which there is not an ounce from the sin of the Golden Calf.” - p. *Taan. 68c*

- Yet God always seeks to favor mercy over justice because of their existing relationship:

“Thy mighty hand” (Deut. 3:24): Thou dost **suppress** the quality of justice **with compassion.**” – *Sifre Num. 134*

Election and Covenant

- God always stands ready to forgive because of grace:

“This can be compared to the son of a king who took to evil ways. The king sent a tutor to him who appealed to him saying, ‘Repent, my son.’ The son, however, sent him back to his father, ‘How can I have the arrogance to return? I am ashamed to come before you.’ Thereupon his father sent back word, ‘My son, **is a son ever ashamed to return to his father?** And is it not to your father that you will be returning?’ **Similarly, the Holy One, blessed be He, sent Jeremiah** to Israel when they sinned.” – *Deuteronomy Rabbah 2.24*

- It must be noted that **forgiveness and atonement are not separate** categories for the rabbis:
 - **NOT** - a person makes atonement and **THEN** God forgives, but rather
 - a person makes atonement (our side) = God forgives (His side) due to existing relationship
 - This is **not a legalistic framework** where God forgives **BECAUSE** an act of atonement is made (an offering made with bad intentions or without true repentance isn’t valid – cf. *Yoma 8.9*)

Election and Covenant

- Atonement/repentance reflects an issue of personal piety, not theological standing with God:

“...as to afford the most evident proof possible that God looks **not upon the victims as forming the real sacrifice**, but on the **mind and willingness of him who offers them**, that so the durability and firmness of the altar may be ensured by virtue.” – *Special Laws 1.290* (Philo)

“If one sacrifices **ill-gotten goods**, the offering is **blemished**; the gifts of the **lawless** are **not acceptable**. The Most High is **not pleased** with the **offerings of the ungodly**.” – *Wisdom of Ben Sira 34.21-23*

There has to be alignment between the inner and the outer person (wholeness) – purification, repentance, then sacrifice.

Election and Covenant

- So what does it mean to be “righteous” (*tsadaq*):

“[T]hose who accept the covenant, which carries with it God’s promise of salvation, **accept also the obligation** to obey the commandments given by God in connection with the covenant. One who **accepts the covenant** and **remains within it is ‘righteous’**, and that title applies to him **both** as one who obeys God **and** as one who has a ‘share in the world to come’, but **the former does not earn the latter.**” – E.P. Sanders, *Paul and Palestinian Judaism*, pg. 204

The rabbis do not ask how to “**become**” righteous, but how to “**be**” righteous – they presuppose being in the covenant already!

Election and Covenant

- Those who have rejected the covenant and no longer follow Torah have “thrown off the yoke”:

“He that takes upon himself the **yoke of the Law**, from him shall be taken away the yoke of the kingdom and the yoke of worldly care; but he that **throws off the yoke of the Law**, upon him shall be laid the yoke of the kingdom and the yoke of worldly care.” – *Aboth 3.5*

They are no longer considered Jewish or to be partakers in the benefits of Abraham’s covenant.

- But repentance at the end of life can undo a lifetime of throwing off the yoke, and vice-versa.

Next Week's Homework

- Read Matthew 23
- Who are the “woes” directed to?
- What are the criticisms Jesus directs at them?
- Based on our reading today, would the rabbis have agreed with Jesus?
- So how do we interpret the meaning here? Are Jesus’ indictments selective in its accusations? Are they reflective of the church’s experience at the time of Matthew’s writing? Are they true for both Judaism *and* Christianity, ethically speaking?

