

ECONOMIC IMPLICATIONS OF THE FLOOD NARRATIVE

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[dx.doi.org/10.18374/JIBE-21-1.1](https://doi.org/10.18374/JIBE-21-1.1)

ABSTRACT

Many cultural traditions have a flood narrative, but the Biblical narrative is most well known. Scarcity, division of labor, and the law of comparative advantage are all present in the postlapsarian, prediluvian world. Prosperity is achieved. However, violent relationships are contrary to the nature of God; therefore, God sent the Flood.

Keywords: *Scarcity, flood, division of labor, comparative advantage*

1. INTRODUCTION

Quite a few cultural traditions have a narrative of a flood. The earliest recorded narrative comes from Sumerian clay tablets and date to the third millennium BC. The Babylonians also had a flood narrative, as well as the Egyptians, Africans and certain Native American tribes. The most well-known flood narrative is found in the book of Genesis. (Spar, 2009) This essay will be reading the Genesis account of the flood narrative for its economic content, and putting that narrative into conversation with some of the writings of Adam Smith.

The flood narrative of Genesis is told as one event in the context of the creation story which spans from Genesis chapters one through eleven. After Adam and Eve are expelled from the Garden of Eden, the couple conceive and give birth to Cain and then Abel. The relationship between brothers quickly degrades due to the acceptable sacrifice of Abel (the shepherd), and the unacceptable sacrifice of Cain (the farmer). The fratricide committed by Cain was followed by at least two significant events.

First, God punished Cain by removing him from his economic profession. The soil which Cain had tilled no longer yielded its fruit to him, and he was cursed to wander the earth. Cain eventually has children and builds a city for his family. The first city recorded in the Bible – the City of Enoch – is named in honor of Cain's first son.

The second event after Cain's slaying of his brother is that Adam and Eve had a third son, Seth. It is through the line of Seth that Enoch, (a different Enoch from the person for whom the City of Enoch is named) found favor with God, did not taste death, and was taken by God. It is also through the line of Seth that Noah found favor with God and saved humanity from complete obliteration by the flood.

We will detail the story of the prediluvian era as a contrast between the actions and characters in the line of Cain as compared to those in the line of Seth. The line of Cain achieved a degree of prosperity through division of labor and applying the law of comparative advantage. As a result of the division of labor, husbandry, music and industrial arts emerged from the City of Enoch. However, this prosperity in production was coupled with violence – violence personified in Lamech and his poetry.

In contrast to the line of Cain, the lineage of Seth has no evident economic prosperity. Instead, there is mention of the backbreaking toil that emerged out of working the cursed ground caused by the sin of Adam. At the birth of Noah, his father Lamech (a different Lamech from the one who came from the line of Cain) expressed hope that through Noah there would be relief from their toil.

2. THE LINE OF CAIN