

The Image, the Woman and Dominion

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Abstract

The God of the Bible is a self-revealing God. He reveals himself and the plans he has for the human kind. Usually he reveals himself by talking to humans. But at times the Bible records his self-speeches. Places where God talks to himself. These self-speeches are indispensable in understanding the creator God. It gives a rare glimpse of God's very own mind itself.

Introduction

The primeval history might show God as a punishing God without showing much mercy. God seems to be overreacting for seemingly simple acts of disobedience. At the fall all they do is to eat a fruit - Death enters the world to remain forever; At the flood for violence and mixing with the sons of god the whole world is annihilated along with the animals; (On a strict sense this cannot be called disobedience as the law hasn't been given yet. Only the law of conscience is at to work.) At Babel for an act of good entrepreneurship – so it would seem – the language of the Babelites are confused and they are scattered all over the earth – never again to team up as one unified race - not even in the 21st century. As Cain himself groans the punishment is too much and 'is more than what anyone can bear'. But when we look at these incidents through the lens provided by God's self-speeches we truly understand God as a merciful God. His own speeches provide a different picture and it is by studying those speeches that we truly understand his world and actions.

This article surveys God's 'self-speeches' in the primeval history of mankind (Genesis 1-11) to see whether there is anything common in all of them and identifies three main motifs namely 'the image of God, woman as man's helper, and man's dominion over earth' as the key to unlocking the main primeval stories. It analyses the fall, the flood, the tower - the major incidents in the primeval history of mankind – in the light of the above three motifs and argues that it is because that these three motifs were violated by humans it brought punishment for the human race and that the seemingly simple acts of disobedience are not simple after all and are serious in God sight and man's plight.

It is no coincidence that these speeches occur at important junctions in the primeval history of mankind in Genesis 1-11:

- Before the creation of man
- Before creation of the woman
- At the Fall
- At the flood - After the sons of God incident and Before the flood
- Before the first covenant with Noah
- Babel Tower - Before the creation of languages

While God's speeches to humans have been studied¹ a separate study for the God's self speeches in Genesis 1-11 has not been done to the best of my knowledge. Something that comes close to our attempt is The Enigmatic Plurals like "One of Us" (Genesis I 26, III 22, and XI 7) in Hyperchronic Perspective by Lyle Eslinger however the purpose in that article is to discuss the use of the plurals.

The narrator could have put these words as being addressed to a human character – while God talks about creating man in his image as a self-reflection in *Genesis* 1.26, it is repeated as a conversation with Noah in *Genesis* 9.6. But the *omniscient* narrator - who knows what's going on inside the mind of God²- has chosen to put these words as a self-reflection in *Genesis* 1.26. This helps to make God not only a part in the *Genesis* narrative but a central character for whom there is no significant counterpart³. So this is what makes these speeches all the more important - One that is worthy of study and analysis.

A Self-Speaking God?

From Philo onwards some commentators have held⁴ that God is addressing his heavenly court and thus these are not 'self-speeches'⁵. However then it would mean that the angels were involved in the act of creation. In the words of Karl Barth '[Gen. 1.26] does not speak of a mere entourage, of a divine court or council which later disappears behind the king who alone acts'.⁶ It

¹ For example for a study of God's speeches to his covenant people (not self-speeches) in Judges see Lee Roy Martin, (2009) *The Unheard Voice of God*, USA: Deo Pub, and an appreciation of his book in Rickie D. Moore, *Welcoming an Unheard Voice: A Response to Lee Roy Martin's The Unheard Voice of God*, *Journal of Pentecostal Theology* 18 (2009) 7-14,

² R. Alter, *The Art of Biblical Narrative*, 2nd edition (Philadelphia: Basic Books, 2011) p. 158.

³ W. L. Humphreys, *The Character of God in the Book of Genesis: A Narrative Appraisal* (Louisville: Westminster John Knox Press, 2001) p. 30.

⁴ The other views are: Fragment of a myth (the reference is to other pagan gods), Address to creation, Plural of majesty, Address to the heavenly court, Self-deliberation or self-summons, Duality/Plurality within the Godhead see Thomas A Keiser, 2009, The Divine Plural: A Literary-Contextual Argument for Plurality in the Godhead, *Journal for the Study of the Old Testament*, Vol 34.2 (2009): 131-146. The last three seems to be the popular views esp the heavenly court view.

⁵ For a study of the divine council see the unpublished thesis *Visions of the Divine Council in the Hebrew Bible*, Pepperdine University, Malibu, California, accessed via <http://www.hebrew-streams.org/works/hebrew/divinecouncil-ch1.pdf> on 18th June 2013

⁶ Karl Barth, *Church Dogmatics*, III/1, pp. 191-92.

also would mean that men are created in the image of angels too as God said ‘Let *us* make man in our image, after *our* likeness’. It would also put God and angels in same pedestal if we argue that man was created in the image of angels and God. Gordon Wenham argues that when angels appeared on earth they are frequently described as men⁷. However that doesn’t mean that men are in the image of the angels! He himself agrees that the singular verb in 1.27 suggests that God worked alone in creating man (ibid p.28). Clines observes that there would also be a conflict between the plural of v26 and the singular of v27 if we take the heavenly court view⁸. The significant weakness in this view is that it approaches the matter from outside its literary context – not finding any clue to identify the referent⁹ i.e. the immediate context doesn’t speak of any angels. So it is best to take these words as a self-reflection from God¹⁰.

Moreover whenever the heavenly court appears in the Bible it is described in fair detail and the speeches are addressed to a specific person. The two court scene speeches in Job 1.6-12 and 2.1-6 give a glimpse of what’s happening in heaven, whereas the speeches in Genesis give us glimpse of what’s happening inside God’s mind – these speeches show us how God feels us about the humans and their actions. There is no mention of any angels or heavenly beings in the initial chapters of Genesis – except the reference to the Cherubim guarding the garden of Eden.

One possible court scene would be Genesis 18.16-19, however it is happening on earth with two other angels. where ‘the Lord’ says that ‘Shall *I* hide from Abraham what *I* am about to do?’ there is no plural being used. If there is a court one would expect this to be one – as there are three *men* and one is addressed as ‘Lord’. Though this is not heaven there are angels and there is the LORD (V13) - the two men are addressed as *angels* in 19.1. So when God really talks to his angels he doesn’t use the plural form. Angels were involved in what the Lord was about to do to Sodom and Gomorrah – atleast in visiting the place to make sure that what he had heard is true. But the angels were not involved in the act of creation. So it gives more reason to use the plural in Genesis 18 than in Genesis 1 – if we go by the heavenly court theory. But the fact that the plural is not being used shows that the purpose of the plurals (where it is used) - is different - not be address the heavenly court.

This is the same with the heavenly court described in I Kings 22.19-23. God speaks in singular and to specific people.

Isaiah 6.1-13 esp v8 is one place where the plural is used in a heavenly court scene. However no one would argue that Isaiah was to represent the heavenly court i.e. God was looking

⁷ See G.J. Wenham, *Genesis 1-15*, Word Biblical Commentary (USA: Nelson Reference and Electronic, 1987) p. 28.

⁸ D. J. A Clines, ‘Humanity as the Image of God’, in *On the Way to the Postmodern: Old Testament Essays, 1967–1998*, vol. 2 (Journal for the Study of the Old Testament Supplement Series, 293; Sheffield: Sheffield Academic Press, 1998), pp. 447-97.

⁹ Thomas A Keiser, 2009, *The Divine Plural*, p. 134

¹⁰ This view is shared by Jouon, Schmidt, Westerman, Steck, Gross and Dion cited in Wenham, *Genesis* ; see p. 27 onwards for a full discussion of these views).

for someone to go as the representative of the heavenly court. It is also note worthy that LXX uses the term ‘for this people’ and Watts think that this could point to an original use of ‘for a nation’¹¹ – so a reconstructed reading would be ‘*who would go for this nation*’.

It must be noted that I am are not trying to deny the existence or trying comment on whether the heavenly court is a literary concept or a physical concept, but our point simply is that it is too early in the flow of the Genesis narrative to bring the divine court concept. There is simply no indication that there is one.

The Three Motifs

And God said: 'Let us make'¹² man in our image'¹³, after our likeness; and let them have dominion over the fish of the sea, and over the fowl of the air, and over the cattle, and over all the earth, and over every creeping thing that creepeth upon the earth' (Gen. 1:26).

Although this parallels the other ‘let there be’ statements (Gen 1.3,6,9,14,20,24) there is a slight difference. The difference lies not only in the fact that here the plural is used and that there is a reference to the image of God but that this is a reflection. ‘And God said, “Let there be light,” and there was light’ (Gen 1.3). This was a causatory speech i.e. the mere speech itself produced the thing spoken of. But in Genesis 1.26 God is addressing the ‘us’ and the creation seems to have happened a little later. And the narrator goes onto explain that man was created from dust of the earth and that God breathed into him and the woman was created later.

God’s mandate for creating man. After God’s very own likeness. After creating everything else God goes for the masterpiece. While the other things were created just as they are – out of their own kind – man was created after the infinite blueprint – God himself. In creating man God had something to refer to. He had the original sitting in front of him and posing – so to speak. God made man after his own image. Since he was God’s image, he was asked to rule over the air, sea, earth and all the animals. This dominion is given to him because he is the image of

¹¹ John Watts, *Isaiah, 1-33 Revised*, Word Biblical Commentary (USA: Nelson Reference and Electronic, 2005) p. 104.

¹² Normally the word *Elohim* when used of Israel’s God is used with singular verbs (exceptions exist), however here after the initial reference to *Elohim* instead of a singular verb the verbs are in plural. See Bryan Murphy, The Trinity in Creation, *Masters Seminary Journal* 24/2 (Fall 2013) 167–77

¹³ For the different views on what this image or likeness is see Wenham, *Genesis* p. 29-30 and J. T. Strong “Shattering the Image of God: A Response to Theodore Hiebert’s Interpretation of the Story of the Tower of Babel” *Journal of Biblical Literature* 127, no. 4 (2008): pp. 625–634.

God. As His image he represents God on earth and is to be His ruler¹⁴. So there are two related themes:

Image of God

Dominion over animals of air, sea and earth

Intertwined with the dominion motif is the motif of filling the earth. If man is to have dominion over all these animals and *over all the earth* then obviously he needs to spread out.

And the LORD God said, [It is] not good that the man should be alone; I will make him an help meet for him (Gen. 2:18).

God himself found out that man must not be alone. It is not good. But he is not to look for a helper himself. *I will* make him a helper. Note that the narrator doesn't relate the creation of the woman immediately. First God tried to see if any animal would be a companion to man. So God brings each animal for Adam to name; And name stands for character.

And out of the ground the LORD God formed every beast of the field, and every fowl of the air; and brought [them] unto Adam to see what he would call them: and whatsoever Adam called every living creature, that [was] the name thereof. And Adam gave names to all cattle, and to the fowl of the air, and to every beast of the field; but for Adam there was not found an help meet for him (Gen. 2:19-20).

Note the but in verse 20. Adam names all the animals *but* no helper was found for Adam. So animals failed the test. Then God went on to make the woman – Eve was God's idea. He himself made the woman to be man's helper.

Some have seen that woman is part of Gods image and that the plurals used corresponds to the plural of mankind i.e. to man and woman. They also note that both are introduced with the same purpose – in the generation of life Gen 1.26-27¹⁵.

We now have a 3rd new theme,

Man's companion must be a woman – the one created by God. Putting it the other way woman must be a companion to man and to man alone.

As per the central thesis of this article we will now explore these themes in the primeval stories.

¹⁴ Edward M. Curtis has pointed to the function of ancient near eastern victory stelae as the conceptual parallel for image of God in Genesis 1:26–28. The ancient kings set them up to show that they have control over a conquered territory. So humans being God's victory stelae mark the territory –the world- as God's. *Ibid* pp. 629.

¹⁵ Thomas A Keiser, 2009, The Divine Plural

Man Shall not Live Forever

And the LORD God said, Behold, the man is become as one of us, to know good and evil: and now, lest he put forth his hand, and take also of the tree of life¹⁶, and eat, and live forever (Gen. 3:22)¹⁷.

We find God himself making a statement about what has become of man. He has become like one of 'us'. Note that becoming 'like' one of us is different to being created in God's image. Therefore, the basic problem in the fall is not just disobedience but rather an attempt to become like the gods as the serpent promised – a challenge to very essence of God. The image of God now tries to be God himself. One aspect of 'becoming like one of us' is knowing good and evil i.e. rather than letting the creator determine what is good and evil for the creation, now the creation goes to determine what is good for itself. As God's image, man was happy to let God determine that. But now that he has become 'like one of us' he must decide the good and evil for himself. And the history that followed showed that he consistently choose the evil over the good. God stops the creature becoming like the creator in another way too – by living forever. By eating the tree of life he would live forever. So God stopped it from happening. It would also clash with the 'return to dust' curse that God had just given.

Sons of God

That the sons of God¹⁸ saw the daughters of men that they [were] fair¹⁹; and they took them wives of all which they chose. And the LORD said, My spirit shall not

¹⁶ It is striking that even in the *Epic of Gilgamesh* the path to everlasting life is through a plant. The hero Gilgamesh gets the plant but loses it because a serpent carries off the plant. The reference to the serpent could also be parallel to the incident at the Garden of Eden where mankind lost immortality because of a serpent. *Epic of Gilgamesh* Tablet XI.260-280.

¹⁷ Gordon Wenham has observed that the sentence ends in mid-air. He sees the device of aposiopesis used here. The omission of the conclusion conveys the speed of God's actions. G.J. Wenham, *Genesis 1-15*, p. 85.

¹⁸ Scholars are not agreed on the meaning of the term 'sons of God', here is a summary of the major views as catalogued by Rabbi David Tzvi Hoffinann in his commentary (cited in S. Spero, "Sons of God, Daughters of Men?" *Jewish Biblical Quarterly* Vol 40, No. 1,(2012) pp. 15-18):

- 1) The benei elohim (sons of God) were angelic beings – view taken in this article.
- 2) The benei elohim refer to descendants of Seth; Genesis. 5:3 seems to imply that in some important sense Seth reflected the "likeness and image" of God more than Adam's other offspring. One of the problems that I find with this popular view is that it doesn't explain how the offspring became extra human with super human strength.
- 3) Benei elohim refers to certain people, considered an elite class, either because of wealth or leadership qualities.
- 4) Benei elohim refer to the descendants of Cain who were of impressive physical appearance and technologically advanced (this is the view proposed by L. Eslinger in "A contextual Identification of the *bene haelohim* and *benoth haadam*" *Journal for the Study of the Old Testament* 13, (1979) pp. 65-73). There isn't enough biblical evidence to support this view. Why should the descendants of Cain be called sons of God quite so suddenly after their ancestry is described as humans in Genesis 4?

always strive with man, for that he also [is] flesh: yet his days shall be an hundred and twenty years (Gen. 6:1-3).

Why should the fact that the sons of God (whoever they are) have crossed with daughters of men offend God? It is not disobedience. It is not murder. It is not violence. It is not rape.

When men cross with non-men²⁰ what is born is not in the image of God. Since man was created in the image of God, what is born is an insult to that image – an abomination unto the Lord. When the sons of God and daughters of men cross - what is born is the Nephilim. Not men. Moreover this time the ‘helper’ that He created - woman - starts to ‘help’ something that God didn’t intend the woman to help - the sons of God. The woman was created for man and not for the sons of God. We see the ‘woman as helper’ motif violated here. The destruction of Sodom and Gomorrah incident which followed much later – where the main sin is homosexuality – shatters the image of God by making man and man come together.

We have taken the sons of God to mean fallen angels. This view is connected with the fact that the Nephilim in its singular form (*napil*) means the fallen one. This evokes the idea of one fallen in battle cf I Samuel 1:19 *how are the mighty fallen (napelu)*²¹. The Hebrew Bible mentions Nephilim twice once before the flood and once before the conquest (Num. 13:32-33). Some have claimed that in both places they are destroyed by Yahweh²². However a closer reading makes us realize that they were not only defeated by Yahweh but they caused destruction to entire masses. This was true of the pre diluvian society. It is also true of the mention in Numbers - because the presence of the Nephilim scared Israelites they didn’t proceed with the conquest; their lack of faith in Yahweh’s powers brought about the divine punishment – over a period of 40 years the entire Israelite population died in the desert (except Caleb and Joshua) – similar to the destruction by the flood.

We see that the God who referred to man as his own image now refers to him as flesh. In other words, God seems to be emphasizing that man is man and not God – despite man’s best (worst) efforts to become like God he still hasn’t - and never will - succeeded. God is a spirit and

5) Benei elohim refers to individuals who claimed to be Nephilim, demigods, fallen from heaven - the abode of the gods, who ruled over others by virtue of either their physical strength or beauty or aggressive nature. These are the "tyrants" or "heroes" of mythology. See F. Jabini , “Sons of God Marrying Daughters of Man: An Exercise in Integrated Theology”, *Conspectus* Vol. 14 (2012) pp. 81-121 for a survey of views.

¹⁹ A stark contrast is observed between the sons of god and Yahweh by Hendel in C. Auffarth and L.T. Stuckenbruck (Ed) *The Fall of the Angels* (Leiden: Brill, 2004) p. 13. Whereas the sons of God see the women’s bodies with lust Yahweh looks at men’s heart with insight.

²⁰ As to the question whether angelic beings can have intercourse with humans see the story of Sodom and Gomorra where the Sodomites wanted to rape Lot’s angelic visitors.

²¹ Auffarth and Stuckenbruck, *The Fall of the Angels* p 22

²² Auffarth and Stuckenbruck, *The Fall of the Angels* p 22

man is flesh. Again God seems to be cautious about not letting man live more than what he ought to – in the last speech God reduced his life span from eternity to mortality. Now even within mortality his years are further reduced. Because he is flesh it seems proper to God that he should not live longer. In referring to the spirit of God and the flesh of man the narrator makes an allusion to the initial act of creation, where God breathed his breath into man and made his flesh come to life. The initial act of creation is going to be destroyed by the flood that is to follow.

Why was man punished for the mistake of the sons of god? While we cannot fathom the full reason – it is suffice to mention that man was responsible for this. The text doesn't say that the daughters of man were raped. They were *taken to be wives* i.e. they were given in marriage. And children were born to them. So no force has been used. It is with their consent and probably with the consent of their families – that they were taken to be wives by the sons of god. That's why God instead of punishing the sons of god punished mankind.

Why does God refer to man's days and the fact that he is flesh soon after these intermarriages? One way to view this could be through man's quest for immortality. After the fall man tried to satisfy his quest for immortality through various means. Adam would have tried to reach for the tree of life – to regain the immortality that he lost in the garden of Eden. That's why God put the Cherubim with a flaming sword to guard the tree of life. Now that the Cherubim with the flaming sword was there, Adam would have been more conscious that he has truly lost immortality. Adam then sought it by begetting children, Cain by building a city and naming it after his son²³ and the Babelites by building a city and a tower – to make a name for themselves – another way to make sure their names remain even after their death. In the Nephilim incident, mankind is again on the same quest²⁴. This time they experiment in a different way. Even when they have children and transfer their life to them they are not immortal. So what if they can produce children who will be different – who are immortal? Mankind thought that by crossing with the sons of god – who are immortal they can regain what they lost in the garden of Eden – immortality. The offspring would be like gods – will live forever. So God counters the very motive behind the crossing and reverses it²⁵. Man hereafter will live much shorter – for only 120 years. He is flesh. He is not God. And obviously we see a decline in the long age that men used to enjoy starting from this incident. The very thing they wanted to achieve by these intermarriages - God destroys. It is the same in the Babel incident. Their main purpose was not to be scattered and

²³ For a very interesting view about Adam's offspring and Cain's City see J. Ellul, *The Meaning of the City*, (Michigan: William B Eerdmans Publishing Company, 1977) p. 1-22

²⁴ P. Borgman sees pride and arrogance in the four stories of - Adam/Eve, Cain, Lamech and Babel. See *Genesis: The Story We Haven't Heard Paperback* (Illinois: IVP Academic, 2001) p. 27-39

²⁵ Miller has seen a correspondence between the sin and the punishment in the Genesis narratives. E.g.: The snake which seduced Eve into eating the fruit now has to eat the sand, Cain who was a farmer has now become a fugitive. See P.D. Miller Jr., *Genesis 1-11 Studies in Structure and Theme*. (Sheffield: JSOT Press, 1978) p. 27

make a name for themselves. They were scattered and the only name they made was *confusion* - Babel.

Destroy Mankind

And GOD saw that the wickedness of man [was] great in the earth, and [that] every imagination of the thoughts of his heart [was] only evil continually. And it repented the LORD that he had made man on the earth, and it grieved him at his heart. And the LORD said, I will destroy man whom I have created from the face of the earth;The earth also was corrupt before God, and the earth was filled with violence. And God looked upon the earth, and, behold, it was corrupt; for all flesh had corrupted his way upon the earth. And God said unto Noah, The end of all flesh is come before me; for the earth is filled with violence through them; and, behold, I will destroy them with the earth (Gen. 6:5-13).

The God who saw that everything he created was good now sees the wickedness of the human race and ‘repents’ of his decision to create. See how God refers to man. First he was referred to as the image of God. Then flesh. Now ‘man whom I have created from the face of the earth’. There is digression and a conscious reference to his mortality and death.

The main sin that offended God here was violence. We see the references to it in Genesis 6:11 and 6:13. Here is another allusion to creation in this whole episode – whereas God commanded mankind (even the animals, Gen. 1:22,28) to fill (*malah, mahle*) the earth man has filled it with violence.

We see our third motif of dominion here. Man was to have dominion over the earth and animals. Now he has dominion over other men. So again it clashes with God initial design - Because the initial mandate God had for mankind had not just been NOT fulfilled but it has been reversed.

We must remember that this is the same God who centuries later told Jonah that “should I not have concern for the great city of Nineveh, in which there are more than a hundred and twenty thousand people who cannot tell their right hand from their left—and also many animals?” (Jonah 4.11)²⁶. So if the Lord determines to destroy the world it must have had strong justifications. In Jonah’s Nineveh God knew that the people would repent. And they did. In the case of Noah’s world God knew that they wouldn’t repent and they didn’t. As we read in I Peter 3.20 God waited patiently while the ark was being built and Noah was preaching to the ungodly world 2 Pet 2.5.

²⁶ We cannot conclude from this statement that the pre diluvian world had less than 120,000 people or the Lord had more compassion during Jonah’s time!

The fact that Noah was a preacher is confirmed even by the extra Biblical sources – both Christian and Jewish – in 1 Clement 7:6; 9:1; Apocalypse of Paul 50. Sibylline Oracles (1.128–192), Josephus (*Antiquities* 1.74)²⁷. So the people had ample opportunities to repent before they were finally destroyed by the flood. As we will see later (the section discussing Cline’s model) God was very careful to give them enough time and opportunities.

The people didn’t just violate one of the motifs but they violated all three - image of God (Nephilim), Helper (women crossing with sons of god) and dominion (violence). So the very purposes of God for mankind was thwarted. That’s why the whole earth was destroyed.

Man and Earth

And the LORD smelled a sweet savor; and the LORD said in his heart, I will not again curse the ground any more for man’s sake; for the imagination of man’s heart [is] evil from his youth; neither will I again smite any more everything living, as I have done. While the earth remaineth, seedtime and harvest, and cold and heat, and summer and winter, and day and night shall not cease (Gen. 8:21-22).

So far, man and earth was a tight combination. Man sins – earth also gets cursed along with man. Because earth was created for man and he was to work it. So to curse earth was to curse man. To make earth difficult to work, is to make man’s life difficult.

But here God says that he will not curse the earth again because of man. God starts to see man and earth as two separate entities. Where as in the previous speeches God spoke about the lifetime of man – or rather of reducing it – here he talks about the lifetime of the earth. This time it is a positive promise – the promise of sustenance and life on earth.

Let’s Scatter Them

And the LORD said, Behold, the people [is] one, and they have all one language; and this they begin to do: and now nothing will be restrained from them, which they have imagined to do. Go to, let us go down, and there confound their language, that they may not understand one another’s speech (Gen. 11:6-7).

²⁷ Michael E. Stone, Aryeh Amihay, and Vered Hillel, *Noah and His Books* 2010, Atlanta: Society of Biblical Literature p. 218 n12, p. 156-158.

Creation goes beyond its' boundaries once again here. Instead of having dominion over the birds of the air, animals of the earth and fish of the sea – now the mankind for the first time tries to enter into another realm – the heavens²⁸. Our third motif of dominion over the earth and filling the earth is violated here. Instead of filling the earth the human race wanted to stay in the same place.

This speech²⁹ has similarities with God's speech after the fall - Just as God stopped man from eating from the tree of life now he stops them from building this tower. In both these the underlying motive is the same. Eating the fruit of the tree of life was a way to achieve immortality. 'Making a name for themselves' is also a quest for immortality. A name that would outlast them, a name that would survive a flood, a name that would win them immortality – in somewhat lesser way than what they could have originally wished for. Even if their bodies die their names would remain. So this is again man's quest for immortality. God created man in His own image – so that His image³⁰ might fill the earth, man built the tower as a way of making man's image – his name - fill the earth³¹. This observation is further strengthened by the fact that

²⁸ Some commentators have seen the words reaching to the heavens simply as a hyperbole (Nahum M Sarna, Gerhard Von Rad, Theodore Hiebert, Robert Alter) while others have seen it as an threat to heaven itself (Derek Kidner, Gordon Wenham, Claus Westermann, Victor Hamilton, Bruce Waltke). We take the latter view.

²⁹ Many have appreciated the grammatical structure since Fokkeman. Who analysed the grammatical structure of this speech –saw a chiasmus– and concluded that the reversal in sounds shows the basic idea in that passage – man constructs God destructs. Fokkeman, Narrative Art in Genesis (Oregon:Wipf & Stock Publishers, 2004) p. 15

³⁰ John Strong argues for a very interesting view. We looked at his explanation as the image of God as a victory stele. He states "Tampering with the king's image on a stela was a serious offense, tantamount to challenging the dominion of the Assyrian king" (Strong: Shattering the Image of God, pp. 631). He cites a quotation from the cylinder commemorating the restoration of the shrine to Ishtar at Erech, Esarhaddon (680–669 b.c.e.):

"But he who blots out my written name by means of some clever device, destroys my memorial, or changes its location, may Ishtar of Erech look upon him in anger, decree an evil destiny for him, blot out his name and see in the land. Yea, may she have no mercy upon him."

"The curse for erasing a name from a memorial and that for defacing the image on a stela were the same, because the crime was the same... the connection between a victory stele bearing the image of a king and the name of the king was assumed. Thus, when the humans state that their motive for building the city and the tall tower is "to make a name for ourselves" (Gen. 11:4), it would be clear to an ancient reader that the humans were defacing the image of God and were, in essence, scratching off the name of God and replacing it with their own name. This was not a neutral act, though this may be lost on modern readers; it was an act of hubris" (Ibid pp. 632) He concludes "The story of the tower of Babel, then, narrates the tale of the humans in essence scratching the name of God off of his boundary stele and writing their own name in its stead" (Ibid pp. 633).

While there is lot of merit in this view and one cannot fully reject it, it must be noted that his view would make sense if the tower of babel was the stele. As they wanted to make a name for themselves by building the tower. Since he considers the humans as the divine stele his explanation is not very consistent.

³¹ "The pretentious decision to build to the skies, "Let us bake bricks. .Let us build ourselves. . .Let us make ourselves a name" (11:3–4) contains a distorted echo of God's original decision to make humankind ("Let us make humankind in

the same word for make is used in ‘let us make (*asah*) man in our image’ (Gen. 1.26) and ‘Let us make (*asah*) a name for ourselves’ (Gen. 11.4³²).

Is God is threatened by the actions of mankind? This would make the biblical account sound like the story of the Titans reaching heavens to dislodge the gods. It is interesting to note that God didn’t confuse the languages during Noah’s time - rather he sent the flood. Because if he had done so it wouldn’t have made a difference. Humans would have gone to different countries and started to live violently as before³³. So in saying that *nothing will be restrained from them* what God is essentially saying is that if they are to go on like this they will eventually become violent as the pre diluvian society³⁴ - which will require a punishment similar to that of the flood – global destruction – from God. So God in his kindness stops the world from going into that state and from another destruction as He had promised Noah that such a destruction would not take place. So while the Tower of Babel stands primarily as a symbol of human pride it also is a symbol of God’s kindness and his faithfulness to his promise.

This view finds support in the thematic allusion (a grammatical allusion is not probable as different words are used) that can be seen in *which they have imagined (yetser) to do* to the words in Genesis 6:5 - *every imagination (zamad) of the thoughts of his heart [was] only evil continually*. The table below summarizes our main ideas:

	Saw/Visit	Reference to man’s age	Man’s state	Restrictions/promise of punishment/ blessing
Fall	Behold/God was walking in the cool of the day	Live for ever	Knows good and evil	Tree of life
Flood	God saw 6.5	120 years	Imagination is evil	120 years Flood
Post Flood	Lord smelled	Earth shall continue	Imagination is evil	Life will continue on earth
Babel	Came down to see	We want to make a name for ourselves	People are one	Confuse their languages

our own image,” 1:26). T.L Brodie, *Genesis as Dialogue, A Literary, Historical and Theological Commentary* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2001) p 199

³² Andreas Hock, From Babel to the New Jerusalem (Gen 11,1-9 and Rev 21,1–22,5), *Biblica* Vol. 89 (2008) 109-118. Hock works with the Greek terms in the Septuagint.

³³ Marlowe has seen violence as the sin which God punished in the Babel incident; one of his arguments is that the word for tower is used as a siege tower with a military motive in other places. See W. C. Marlowe, “The Sin of Shinar (Genesis 11:4)”, *European Journal of Theology* (2011) 20:1, pp. 29–39

³⁴ A close parallel would be Yahweh’s statement to Abraham in Gen 15.16 – *for the iniquity of the Amorites [is] not yet full*. So if Babelites went onto complete the project would become even more corrupt.

Common things in all the speeches

D J Clines basing his model on Von Rad and Claus Westermann' proposals comes with the following model for analysing some of the events where these speeches occur³⁵:

	Story	Sin	Speech	Mitigation	Punishment
1	Fall	3.6	3.14-19	3.21	3.22-24
2	Cain	4.8	4.11-12	4.15	4.16
3	Sons of God	6.2	6.3	? 6.8, 18ff	? 7.6-24
4	Flood	6.5, 11f.	6.7, 13-21	6.8, 18ff.	7.6-24
5	Babel	11.4	11.6f.	? 10.1-32	11.8

He sees the major these of sin, a divine speech, mitigation and punishment recurring in the Gen 1-11 narratives. I would propose that God's confirmation be added to the above model. God investigates the situation before punishing³⁶. God visits before punishing in both the Fall and Babel narratives. In the Babel narratives he come downs to see - although this doesn't mean physical visitation. Same thing happens in Sodom and Gomorrah. Where a visit or coming down is absent – he 'sees' that the wickedness is great. In Cain's case he questions him about his brother before punishing him. So these narratives – while portraying Yahweh as someone who punishes his creatures – shows him as someone who does it after careful consideration and with reluctance. God either visits or sees to make sure that the sin is as serious as it claims. With my proposal the model would look as below:

	Story	Sin	Confirmation	Speech	Mitigation	Punishment
1	Fall	3.6	3.8	3.14-19	3.21	3.22-24
2	Cain	4.8	3.9	4.11-12	4.15	4.16
3	Sons of God	6.2	6.2,6.5	6.3	? 6.8, 18ff	? 7.6-24
4	Flood	6.5, 11f.	6.12	6.7, 13-21	6.8, 18ff.	7.6-24
5	Babel	11.4	11.5	11.6f.	? 10.1-32	11.8

³⁵ Clines, D. J., 1996 *The theme of the Pentateuch*, 2nd Edition, JSOT Supplement Series, Sheffield : Sheffield Academic Press p. 67-68

³⁶ Bruce Waltke cites the fall, Cain and Sodom and Gomorrah stories as examples. *Genesis*, Bruce Waltke, Zondervan, 2001

CONCLUSION

In all the above incidents we see the same motives running through. God made man in his own image and gave a helper so that he would fill the earth and have dominion over the earth. This was God's mission statement for man and for this article. Everything went wrong because man failed to keep it. God is a not God who delights in punishing humans, he does it after a lot of verification and with great reluctance and only when there is no other option.