

APOCALYPSE

One day God looked down on the earth and all God saw was the wickedness of human beings. And God regretted having created human beings, and God's heart was saddened. So God decided to wipe all living things off the face of the earth. But there was one righteous man named Noah, blameless in his time, who walked with God. God said to Noah, 'The earth is filled with violence and I will destroy it. Make yourself an ark of wood. Make it with reeds. Cover it with pitch. And bring your wife and your sons and your sons' wives inside this ark. And bring two of every living creature.

Noah did as God commanded. He loaded in every sort of fowl, cattle, and creeping thing. Clean and unclean, two by two, male and female, they came into Noah's ark. And on the seventh day the floodgates of the sky and the fountains of the earth burst open. And for forty days and forty nights it rained, until the mountains on earth were covered with swirling waters and all life outside the ark was dead and every living creature drowned.

But God remembered Noah. God made a wind pass over the earth and the waters subsided and the ark came to rest on the mountains of Ararat. Noah released a raven and it flew back and forth but found no dry land. Then Noah sent out a dove, and when it returned with an olive leaf, Noah knew the flood was over.

God spoke to Noah and said, 'You and your wife and your sons and your sons' wives must leave the ark. Bring all the living creatures with you.' And Noah emptied the ark and built an altar and made burnt offerings to God. And the Lord smelled a sweet smell and said, 'Never again will I destroy all living creatures, or doom the earth because of man.'

And God said to Noah and his family, 'Be fruitful and multiply and replenish the earth.' A rainbow appeared in the clouds and God said to Noah, "My bow shall serve as a sign of the covenant between me and the earth. When rainclouds gather I will see the bow and remember the covenant with Noah."

God blessed Noah and blessed his sons, Ham, Shem and Japheth. And Noah planted a vineyard. He drank the wine, got drunk, and lay naked in his tent. And Ham, his son, looked at his father's nakedness, but his two brothers turned their faces away and covered him with a garment. And when Noah woke from his drunken sleep and realized what Ham had done, he cursed the son of Ham, Canaan, saying "Damned be Canaan. He shall be a servant of servants to his brothers." And Noah blessed Shem and Japheth and lived three hundred and fifty years after the flood.

SHOW #4: APOCALYPSE

BILL:

You're the newspaperman among us. If you were doing this story for the front page of The Wall Street Journal tomorrow what would the headline be?

BARNEY:

God-- destroys the world. *(LOWER THIRD)*
The deck would probably say-- one family survives, along with-- many animals.

BILL:

And if you had been sent out to cover it, what would be your description of-- of-- of the earth after the waters receded?

BARNEY:

AHH-- it's interesting, because a fire consumes, in many ways. Or an explosion-- and a fire can consume. But a flood leaves everything for the most part, and so it can be as awful as almost anything you've seen. So I think--

BILL:

Blo-- bloated bodies?

BARNEY:

Yes.

BILL:

Animals all over the-- carcasses all over the place?

BARNEY:

Yes.

BILL:

~~WORLD BE~~ **A stench?** ~~WAS NOT DESTROYED THE~~

BARNEY:

Yes. And-- all in this muddy, mucky mess.

BILL:

But you said, "God destroys the earth not Noah is saved." That-- that would be your lead?

BARNEY:

The story, for me, through the years, has been-- rainbows and the fun of the Ark. At least as a child, which is where I first heard the story, of course, in church in Sunday school. It's-- it's this Ark. And the fun of getting on it and-- and going for a sail with all those animals! It's like your own personal zoo. So all of that was a childhood memory, and to come back and read it again, about the awfulness of God destroying the

BARNEY (CONT'D):

whole earth. And-- and more than that, I was struck by the fact that he was so sure that the people were evil, and-- and had no social redeeming value. God was so condemning about everything. And I think that that-- is why I would have to say, that the lead for the first edition that Noah's sons put out of the newspaper ~~would have to be, "God had destroyed the earth."~~

FATHER:

Aren't you saying that, though, because you're a reporter? *(LOWER THIRD)* And a writer for a modern newspaper? You're using Western logic.

BILL:

What do you think it might have been, then? Why is the story a--

FATHER:

The devastation-- clear. But don't forget, Noah plants a vineyard. So the fertility of the land was not affected. So I think the-- the point of the story, for the ancient writer-- when you say, "God was so-- shall we say-- he regrets making human beings so much," it's not so much that from the G-- the God perspective, as that the human

FATHER (CONT'D):

perspective-- human beings are responsible and accountable for their actions. God is not the supreme patsy in the sky, the ultimate Rotarian, the supreme good guy. God holds human beings accountable. Why? Because they're made free.

BURT:

But, Alex-- what would your headline be? I mean, ~~it seems~~ it seems like Barney's headline still captures that. Right? *(LOWER THIRD)* "God Destroys" I mean, that-- that God is gonna hold you accountable.

FATHER:

Right. But you can't say that the people were the way they were because of their heredity or environment, where they grew up or because of their family. The text is telling us that human beings are indeed accountable, and God holds them accountable.

KAREN:

So where does evil come from? God is the creator of the world. *(LOWER THIRD)* God is totally good. And yet the people he ha-- have-- has created are totally evil. All the imaginations of

KAREN (CONT'D):

their heart are evil. This is one of the-- the problems about monotheism, surely. And I don't agree that the people of the time wouldn't have concentrated on the destruction. Because it's-- it's a sort of religious nightmare of the a-- ancient world. We hear all the time about creator gods, bringing the world out of the chaos of the ~~the~~ primal waters. Now, you have a creator god. Just using the primal waters to blot out the world. I think it's a nightmare, and I think that when you hear this story as a child-- y- I- I didn't think about the coziness of the Ark. I was thinking about a frightening God, who could easily blot you out. So that when you're told later, "God so loved the world that he sent his only begotten son," you think, "Yeah, but what about-- what about Noah, what about the Flood?"

BLU:

But that's exactly-- the story, I think, is not about the accountability of human beings, but it's about the transformation of the relationship between God and humanity. *(LOWER THIRD)* And God moves from expectations of perfection in human

BLU (CONT'D):

beings, to accepting flawed-- y-- t-- human beings as they are, with all their flaws. And each side-- that-- that paves the way for the covenant, in fact.

BURT:

I'm very taken with Blu's point, that-- that God no longer expects perfection. When you said that, the first thought that popped in my head is, is that God actually recognizes that humanity really is created in God's image. And this is a God who, after creating and saying everything's good, God finally decides, well, it's really not working. I gotta destroy this and start all over.

BILL:

Well, why?

BURT:

Well-- I think part of it's introspection on-- of God. God realizes that-- that there does have to be room for change and failure. That God can create something that's gonna fail. So how much the more so humans can do that.

BLU:

In a certain sense, you can almost say that this

BLU (CONT'D):

is the maturation of God, just as it is the maturation of human beings. Just as a parent, you know, doesn't--

BILL:

But you're still avoiding the question. What did human beings do that caused God to reverse his decision and his judgment about the goodness of his creation?

CAROL:

I think what's so interesting about Noah is, it doesn't really say. It doesn't really say, and I think this is about-- *(LOWER THIRD)* it's about regret. And it's about how destructive regret is. I mean, God re--

BILL:

Regret on?

CAROL:

God regrets his creation. And it's as if he's completely involved in his own creation, which he thought was good and then he looks, and then he's overcome with this feeling of regret. And it's not clear. It's not com-- it's not clear in the text why he regrets. What is clear in the text is

CAROL (CONT'D):

how destructive this regret is, because the regret leads him to wipe out this-

BURT:

But how do you avoid regret? I mean, h-- how--

CAROL:

I don't think you do avoid-- I mean, I think that's why it's such a-- why it's such a powerful human story-- I mean, ~~who hasn't felt the feeling of regret?~~

BILL:

You think the regret is-- you know, Adam and Eve-- their first act was to disobey the one commandment God gave them. Cain slew his brother Abel after God had said, "Master your passions." I mean, the human race turns out to be murderous. And rebellious.

BLU:

And flawed.

CAROL:

Well, I know-- well, I mean, that's one way to do it. But I mean, the other way is to say the human-- the human race turns out to have desires that if it, I mean, to-- to the Adam and Eve

CAROL (CONT'D):

story-- to desire to know good and evil. To desire to eat of the tr-- of the tree of knowledge. And it's g-- I really think I-- I agree. It's God coming into relationship with the humans that-- whom he has created. And-- I mean, feeling that sense of-- of-- first-- I mean, I don't know. It's like moving out of your own ~~fantasy world~~ into relationship, and the first sense is wanting to move back. To start all over again. To-- to go back into that.

BILL:

But how do you cope with the reality of the price the people pay because of God's sad heart?

CAROL:

Because I don't think he sees the people. And that's what I mean about regret. It's-- it's-- it's self-enclosed, as the Ark is.

BARNEY:

I don't think Alex's accountability works for me, because the God is too sweeping. This is a generic destruction. I get no sense that he's gone through-- and looked at the grade cards. I get the feeling this is the human race. I-- I

BARNEY (CONT'D):

agree with what Carol is saying. I think-- and he is saying-- "they're all bad." And-- and Noah is almost a token. I don't believe Noah was clearly, in other words, the difference between first and second place, I have to believe, was pretty small. In other words, whoever the next best man or family was. So it was God saying, "The human race--" this is what hits me so hard, is-- "the human race is bad.

SAM:

Has anyone-- *(LOWER THIRD)* contemplated the fact that-- the humans had begun to use their freedom, and among the freedoms that they had was freedom to reject what God wanted them to be.

FATHER:

An important question.

SAM:

Yes. When you're free, you can say no. You can veto God. And after a period of time, you know, the Bible-- it compresses it-- the freedom had just made a mess of things. And God's gonna stop it and try again. But you know, my headline would not have been "God destroys the world." My

SAM (CONT'D):

headline would have been, "God gives humans a second chance." My emphasis would fall on the bow and on the cloud, and on the second chance. The whole story of the Ark, to my mind, is a story-- I know what you're gonna say. (LAUGHTER)

BILL:

What were you gonna say, Karen?

KAREN:

I was going to say that this is, this is one of the aspects of religion that I find hardest to take, sometimes. To think concentrating on us in the Ark-- us cozy outside-- and forget about the people outside. Very often, we've demonized people on the outside of our faith, of our society. We've pushed them and Noah does that immediately. He gets out of the Ark, he starts demonizing Canaan. And-- and we don't th-- I-- my memory of the flood is Poussin's (PH) painting, where you've got-- you don't see the Ark. You just see a whole lot of people, and a waste of waters, and people drowning. And-- but in the Ark we're all right, we don't care about the-- that they-- the carnage, and the pitiable human-- mess outside. We--

BURT:

See, I think Noah is not quite as-- as negative as you're painting him. As-- as someone was--

KAREN:

I haven't mentioned Noah yet.

BILL:

No, no, she-- y-- you're moving--

BURT:

~~But you said "demonizing the--" you know--~~

BILL:

Burt, you keep avoiding the question of God's nature here. I mean, Karen has just described a scene of great carnage. Noah had nothing to do with it. He's on the Ark, but as he looks around. God has wrought this great, great devastation. And the question that I think you're point raises is-- is about God. Why does God have to destroy everyone, just because he's unhappy with the choices we make? I mean, can't he distinguish between a misdemeanor and a felony?

FATHER:

Whoa! Let's not forget the kind of literature we're dealing with here. If we fail to understand the literary genre, the kind of literature that it

FATHER (CONT'D):

is, we will misinterpret the text. This-- for want of a better word-- is a parable of sorts. Taking this as parable now-- humankind cannot negate the goodness of God, even though it tries.

CAROL:

I think it's a parable, but I think it's a parable about regret, and I think that's what the text says. That's where the text starts. God regrets. And it's a parable about relationships, and it's a parable about families. It's about all parents who create children in a certain sense, in their own image, and then feel regret, which is a terribly destructive feeling, that leads you to want to-- it leads to anger and betrayal. I mean, who hasn't felt these feelings, in the sense of "I'll wipe everything out and start again?" And I think the parable-- is, is it teaches the lesson of the destructiveness of acting on that regret in that way. Because, after all, what happens at the end is, he's right back where he's begun.

BILL:

So how do you-- how do you read that line that talks about his saddened heart?

CAROL:

Yes. I think because-- because his saddened heart is-- I mean-- that somehow, he's created this and it's not what he imagined it to be. It is other than him. It's not just in his image. I mean, you don't-- the wonderful thing about--

BILL:

Creation. Pe-- we are other--

CAROL:

You know, we are, but every one of us-- people don't reproduce-- none of us reproduce ourselves. You c-- I mean, that's the nature of human reproduction. It is a relationship. And it's-- I think it's an amazing parallel, the parable at the beginning of the book of Genesis, of perhaps one of the most profound and difficult psychological truths about being a person, and being a parent, and having children. And you know, that wish, that destructive impulse of regret. And the water-- I think it's, you know, from water we came, to water we-- I'll just make everything water again, and start all over again. But you can't! I mean, you know, if you've had children, you can't.

BLU:

No, but parents don't-- I don't think so. I don't think, as a parent-- you know, I don't think I ever had that feeling of wiping them out and starting all over again. I think there's something--

SAM:

You haven't?

BLU:

No, I haven't. (LAUGHTER) I've had other kinds of-- maybe--

SAM:

Not for one second?

CAROL:

Not one day, one time, thinking, "If I could do it again, I wouldn't be in this situation?" (LAUGHS)

SAM:

Early one morning. I mean--

BLU:

No, I might have thought I would like to jump off the roof, or maybe, you know, do some other-- destructive thing. But no, I never had the feeling. And I don't think that's how parents feel. I'll just wipe them all out and start all

BLU (CONT'D):

over again. I can't relate to that as a parent. I think i-- it is a story about overreaction. God overreacted here. And you're asking-- your focus on the words, I think, brings up, you know, the sense of God regretting, and God feeling sorry, is-- there's almost a sense of intimacy, of caring. This is a very personal God. Has a very s-- strong, intimate relationship with human beings. He's not just an uncaring God, you know. "I'll smash 'em all down," and that--

BILL:

But that's what he does. Just take the story--

(OVERTALK)

BILL:

Forget the source for a moment. Forget-- everything except, that's what most people, opening this story, get-- is that God destroys everybody except a small handful, because he's sad, he's sorry, he's angry, whatever. And he wipes them out! I mean, that's in the text. It's in the story.

BLU:

It's very difficult for a person of faith to

BLU (CONT'D):

accept that kind of-- that action. I d-- I don't dispute that.

BILL:

So how do you resolve it? And you're-- you are a person of faith.

BLU:

Yes. Because I-- I-- I think this is, first of all, the idea about taking this as a parable, and perhaps not destroying every last, living being-- there's some part of me that wants to believe that.

SAM:

It never struck me that these stories have to hit on all eight cylinders. (LAUGHS)

BLU:

Yeah.

SAM:

It's the nature of these stories to make one point. Or two points. Or three points, at most. And I think the point here is that God made the world. It was good. And p-- a part of that goodness, Bill, was the freedom that-- that humans had to veto God. To say no. And I think that the

SAM (CONT'D):

destruction is not the end of the story. That's part of the story, to bring us to the redeeming love of God given-- that's why I said I would like to alter that headline, or put a subhead under it: "God gives a second chance." So instead of us resting on the-- o-- o-- on the hard-heartedness of God--

KAREN:

I can't forget what the hard heartedness of God though when I read this. I can't forget it. I-- I'm-- you feel there's a suffering God and I think that's interesting. You feel that-- that you've-- I cannot forget the destructiveness. And--

BLU:

If you stop at it though. If you stop at the destructiveness, then you have nothing.

KAREN:

I'm not suggesting you do stop with the destructiveness-- because I think that perhaps the only way of dealing with this story is to say that God can be a shock. God can be s-- the reality that we call God can be such a shock that it confounds what we absolutely expect-- that God is

KAREN (CONT'D):

not some-- nice, cozy daddy-- in the sky. He doesn't behave as-- He (ridiculous pronoun) doesn't behave as we would wish, but at it-- God can shock us to the core and we sometimes forget this in our-- cozy, religious worlds. "My thoughts are not your thoughts," says the Lord. "My ways are not your ways--" In Hinduism they say that evil is one of the masks of God. And I think that here you see God behaving (I'm sorry to say it) in an evil way-- this is-- and where does evil come from? And this is wh--

CAROL:

I think it's so dangerous at the end of this century to call good this kind of destruction.

KAREN:

Yes.

CAROL:

I mean, even to rationalize it, to see that it's teaching a lesson. I mean, we have the Holocaust. We have the-- the specter of nuclear destruction and to say that you know, some group is going to survive and it's for a good end and for a good purpose. I mean, I think that's really, really--

SAM:

I'm sorry. I can't lay that at God. I lay that at human freedom. The freedom we have is real.

CAROL:

But humans don't cause the flood.

SAM:

We have the freedom to create holocaust. We have the freedom to create human slavery.

KAREN:

But we don't have the freedom to wipe out-- we didn't in Noah's time have the freedom to wipe out the world and God did and did.

SAM:

No we have the freedom to have consummate evil amongst us, rejecting God's goodness and God regretted that God had made me because we were acting so terribly at bat. And so God brings the destruction in order to-- to show that God wants a new beginning.

FATHER:

God is not evil. It's very clear in Genesis Three when they violate the com-- human beings have introduced evil into the world. And this business of God regretting or in the Greek text God getting

FATHER (CONT'D):

angry with human beings because of the waywardness of their human heart. The-- When we speak about the total destruction, this is only in terms of a story framework. It doesn't merely mean anything like this ever happened. I mean.

BLU:

If you say that that's saying-- I agree with you.

~~It--it's very difficult--~~ to say or impossible for a person of faith to say, "God is evil," but can you say that God did something that was not good? Can you say that as a person of faith?

FATHER:

Well, I wouldn't say that. I would say God does things that I don't judge to be intelligible.

BURT:

But why won't you say that? The Bible itself says that. The Bible says God c-- o-sey-shalom-ovore-rah (PH), God creates peace and creates evil. It's very, very clear. It's in scripture. I-- I was taken aback and-- you-- you-- you called me on it, Bill. I was avoiding God precisely because of that 'cause it's hard for me as a rabbi to say, "Yes, God does evil things." And-- and Carol kind

BURT (CONT'D):

of gave me a-- a parable to deal with it-- God is blind in this story. God creates humanity in God's own image. You can't have a relationship when you don't really see the other person, the other party. All God sees when God looks at humanity initially is God-- I would not use the parent/child analogy though. I would use the marriage analogy. Hosea's analogy that it's a marriage gone awry. When you have a partner in a marriage and you look at that partner and all you see is yourself, you wind up regretting it because you don't really have a relationship.

BILL:

And some people wind up murdering.

FATHER:

Mm-hmm (AFFIRM).

BLU:

Yes.

BURT:

Or getting divorced--

BLU:

Or picking--

BURT:

Or just ending it.

BLU:

Right.

BURT:

And that's what God does. God ends it. The relationship can't continue under those circumstances.

BLU:

I'll pick up my marbles and I'm gonna-- Walk away, right.

CAROL:

But I think of because I mean, there-- even in the image of the ark, this is a book about-- it's about enclosure. And I-- I think-- I think that the God he/she of Genesis is such a human god. This is such a psychological-- this is such a psychological story and it's about-- you know, it's about how people-- it's about development and it's about education. It's a profound--

BILL:

What do you mean a psychological story exactly?

CAROL:

Well, even when you said before, the sadness--

CAROL (CONT'D):

first of all regret. I mean the-- the-- the real reason for the flood is regret. It's a psychological story. It's about what happens when people feel-- when you feel regret. You mention sadness in his heart. It's-- it's really-- I think it's a story about coming into a relationship. I like what you said Burt about it's a marriage story. It's about the education that is any relationship, that's a marriage, that's about having children. It doesn't come fully formed and you have to learn and mistake is built into it. I mean, the sense of creating a world, a human world in which there is mistake, but the lesson is, what do you do when you feel you've made a mistake or when you feel you've regret? Do you wipe everything out and I think that impulse is so terrible and so destructive. And I mean, if I take this as a parable it's a parable about what not to do in the face of a feeling of regret or mistake.

BLU:

Yeah.

FATHER:

But it's more than simply regret. Remember that's only in one of the deditions. The reason for the flood is God regretting because of the wickedness of the human heart. And the other dedition is lawlessness. I mean, that's very clear in the story it's necessary for lawlessness to have-- have a retribution.

CAROL:

But then I have trouble with it.

KAREN:

Yes, me, too.

CAROL:

I mean, then I really, really have trouble. I mean, my sympathetic reading is to read it as a-- as a-- as a deeply moving story about regret. That has a terrible human lesson in it.

FATHER:

One aspect. One aspect.

CAROL:

But if I see it as when someone's lawless you have license to just wipe them out because they're other and they're not-- they're not holy or they're not like you and God. I mean, I think

CAROL (CONT'D):

most of the terrible destruction in the world is created--

KAREN:

And in religion too. Some of the worst things have happened in religion when people have said-- *(LOWER THIRD)* we have the power-- you know, to bring good-- goodness out of this by wiping people out. But perhaps, Carol, you can also see it.

Instead of just seeing it as a, you know, as an adult. God as an adult. God as a child here-- you know how children when they've made something and don't like it and just smash it. Whomff, whomff, whom. This is an undeveloped God.

BARNEY:

Or a petulant teenager. (LAUGHTER)

CAROL:

Yes, I think that's right. I think this is a book about the education of a God.

KAREN:

God-- God is growing up-- in Genesis-- and-- and we see him here. He's-- he's inchoate. He doesn't understand what he's doing. He is-- hasn't issued any instructions as far as I know to

KAREN (CONT'D):

human beings, except, "Go forth and multiply--"
you know, Noah is righteous. We-- does-- we-- you
know, we haven't actually got a-- a clear code as
yet. And then God says, "I don't like this."
Wham, wham, smack like a child knocking down a
sand castle. And gradually God has got to grow up
and learn like the rest of us how to relate to
--other people:

CAROL:

(LOWER THIRD) And that you can't just wipe
them out--

KAREN:

Yes. Yes.

CAROL:

--I mean, the fact that this ends with a covenant,
which is I'm going to stay in this relationship
and work it out in this relationship. That's a
huge-- I mean--

BLU:

And God admitting I'm never, ever going to do this
again.

CAROL:

Yes, that's it.

KAREN (CONT'D):

human beings, except, "Go forth and multiply--"
you know, Noah is righteous. We-- does-- we-- you
know, we haven't actually got a-- a clear code as
yet. And then God says, "I don't like this."
Wham, wham, smack like a child knocking down a
sand castle. And gradually God has got to grow up
and learn like the rest of us how to relate to
--other people.

CAROL:

(LOWER THIRD) And that you can't just wipe
them out--

KAREN:

Yes. Yes.

CAROL:

--I mean, the fact that this ends with a covenant,
which is I'm going to stay in this relationship
and work it out in this relationship. That's a
huge-- I mean--

BLU:

And God admitting I'm never, ever going to do this
again.

CAROL:

Yes, that's it.

FATHER:

Because it's a different kind of literature.

CAROL:

Well, but-- yes, I think-- well, or-- let--let's say, a different kind of relationship. But in order to speak, you have to have someone who listens. And the God of the Noah book is not someone who's listening. And so Noah, I mean, I think the "in his generation" is a really interesting qualification, because in a generation where God is not listening, where people are not speaking to God, Noah is a righteous man because he tends his garden. He takes care of his animals and his family and walks with God. But I think that, I mean, I think this a-- this is a profound-- I think it's-- it's-- it's a profoundly important story for our time. It's an education of God. It's an education about coming into a relationship about what happens. Because Noah, in a way, is so innocent. He doesn't know. He just walks with God. And then he loses, in the course of this story, he loses his righteousness. I mean, he loses the qualification. He becomes, at the end, simply Noah.

FATHER:

How does he lose his righteousness?

CAROL:

Well, I think that what happens-- and I think it often is what happens-- is when a person-- the-- the goodness of Noah-- that is, in a way, his innocence-- puts him into a situation of radical disconnection-- discontinuity. I mean, he has to turn his back. It's what Karen is emphasizing over and over again: What cost to-- to people, what cost to humanity, what cost to God, if you will, to cut yourself off radically and just say, "I don't care."

BILL:

We have a problem here. I mean, if-- if the-- the story says, he was chosen because he was righteous. He walked with God. He was righteous in his generation. If righte-- but if-- if he were disengaged, and righteousness is not disengagement, did God make a mistake? God must have thought him an exceptional man. Why do you think he was chosen?

FATHER:

Precisely because he is set apart. That's what

FATHER (CONT'D):

chosen means, to be set apart. He's righteous, he's "TZADDIK", he walks with God. To walk with God, means a relationship with God. See, I don't want to rewrite the story. What I'm hearing some of you say, you want to rewrite the story. Well, fine. You rewrite your story. But don't say that's what the Bibles say. I want answers--

~~SOMEONE~~ (OVERTALK)

BILL:

But the Bible leaves us with this question, what is righteousness? What do you think righteousness is?

FATHER:

Righteousness is a whole gamut of meanings. It-- it means having a right relationship with God, with human beings-- law abiding, in terms of God's law abiding. Doing what needs to be done, when it's supposed to be. And when his silence is called for, that's when he's silent.

BILL:

There's another element here too is there not? I mean, let's-- we have to face the fact that in the-- in the lineage of this story, in the

BILL (CONT'D):

narrative of this story that runs from Genesis all the way through the Hebrew Bible, God is picking his favorites.

FEMALE VOICE:

Uh-huh (AFFIRMATIVE).

BILL:

God is choosing-- the chosen get selected out sometimes irrespective of their char-- character.

CAROL:

Yes.

BILL:

We will find later that Abraham is himself, a very flawed man. But righteousness here, may mean just simply, he found favor in this god's eyes.

CAROL:

But he's chosen in-- by a God who wants him to make such a break with the rest of humanity, that it destroys the very righteousness that allowed him to maintain that-- after all, what did Noah do? He took care of his animals. So that at the end, he's separated from his-- the-- the trouble has come into Noah's family. That this is--

BLU:

Right.

CAROL:

--this is a--

BLU:

His merit and his flaw are the same thing. He was so-- had so much integrity of family that he only looked after his family. And--

BILL:

I've never thought of it this way actually.

BLU:

--didn't mount the protest.

BURT:

But is it-- you know, righteousness is a complicated thing. And in the Noah story it's very clear that it's-- you know, on-- on this horizontal level, humanity-- how-- how you treat other people. And then also, how you relate to God. If you are in a universe that everyone around you is really unredeemably evil, there is--

CAROL:

I don't know what that means Burt. What does that mean?

KAREN:

Yes. What does it mean?

CAROL:

I don't-- I really-- that doesn't-- that-- that is the-- that is the conclusion of the Noah story. Everyone is unredeemably h-- evil, and God will live with that. I don't know what that means. Unredeemably. That people are born evil?

(OVERTALK)

BLU:

But you--

CAROL:

I mean, are we into original sin now? I didn't--

BURT:

No, it's not original sin. But that is what the Torah says. The Torah says that-- that--

CAROL:

At the end of the story.

BURT:

That-- that God chooses to destroy the world, because God regrets that the humanity that God's created is "HEESH HEET AL TACKAM HA'ARETZ" (PH). They-- they-- they just they're just unredeemable.

BLU:

Because--

(OVERTALK)

BURT:

And that's why God makes the-- we'll come back to the indictment of God.

CAROL:

Well, then we-- we come back to God then--

~~there is still we're~~ FEMALE VOICE: ~~isn't he~~

Yes.

CAROL:

--because if God-- if God in fact has power to redeem, or if God has-- has great power, then why-- what-- what does this mean to say unredeemable. I mean, if we believe in life, if we believe in hope, if we believe in change.

KAREN:

Redemption.

CAROL:

If we believe in redemption. If we just believe in-- in life itself, which is really what-- in the end-- I mean, the-- that-- that it is through life and in life that you have to work out problems.

BURT:

See I want to start with the--

BARNEY:

But redemption is-- is--

CAROL:

Then what is it?

BARNEY:

--it's because of evil. It seems to me that--
that--that-- if evil weren't here, we wouldn't need
redemption. And God is saying there is evil in
man.

CAROL:

I think--

BARNEY:

But it seems to me, for you to say non-redeemable.
It-- redemption to me is-- is there. That's--

BILL:

Well, God clearly thought that it was an
irredeemable race--

CAROL:

Right.

BILL:

--because he wiped out everybody except this--

(OVERTALK)

BURT:

Yes. See, I want it-- I want it to start with that given, but-- but--

BLU:

Well, Burt, could you say--

BURT:

--you challenged the given. Let-- let me just finish it up. That-- that if it's true (LAUGHTER) that humanity were unredeemable-- and-- and Noah chooses to say, "I'm not going to participate in that society. I'm not going to wallow in sin and evil," then it's-- it's not so unreasonable. That's round one. Round two, is Noah to God. Noah makes it clear that he will obey God's law, to the extent to which this guy gets in a rudderless boat and just floats. Puts-- puts himself entirely at God's mercy. Has a very, very clear recognition.

BILL:

Floating menagerie.

BURT:

God closes the door on that ark. It's not even Noah that closes-- I mean, just God locks him in this casket, and it just floats. Now, what does he hear around him? You know, the-- the sounds of

BURT (CONT'D):

dying, and the sounds of rain. And he-- he comes out very damaged.

MALE VOICE:

Yes.

KAREN:

Yes.

CAROL:

Yes.

BURT:

But the only--

CAROL:

Yes, but that's a big point.

KAREN:

Yes.

CAROL:

That he comes out very damaged. Because to-- to-- to survive that he has to close off that very sensitivity that made him righteous in the first place.

BURT:

See this is the--

CAROL:

And I think that--

KAREN:

Yes.

CAROL:

--I mean I think that happens so much in the contemporary context. That people, by virtue of a certain kind of-- let's just say-- sort of simple righteousness or sensitivity get chosen, because that quality draws people, for the reasons that you're saying.

BILL:

This is a frightening part of the story to me, Carol. That there isn't in this whole record, one peep of the victims. There is not so much as a cry of mercy left in the Biblical record. What do you make of that silence?

BLU:

I would say that's too much. It would be too painful. As it is, it's painful enough. And yet if-- and if they were personalized it would become just overwhelming.

KAREN:

Yes. And if you should--

BLU:

I mean, when you know about the Holocaust. The

BLU (CONT'D):

Holocaust-- six-- when you hear about six million, it somehow doesn't have the same wrenching reaction as when you hear about the story of one survivor. Reading this story of total destruction. Reading this story in-- at this time in history, after the Holocaust you come to it with different kinds of questions. And I think--

BILL: How has it affected you vis-a-vis your own faith? What questions are you asking now?

BLU:

I guess that how could God let this happen? Not necessarily how could God do this? But how could God let this happen--?

FATHER:

He had to.

BLU:

And I think that I-- I don't-- I don't think that-- that's not an answer that satisfies me.

FATHER:

Well, let me explain when you're done.

BLU:

Let me just. I think that you're allowed to ask

BLU (CONT'D):

the questions and not necessarily have an answer for every question-- and you're allowed to ask questions about the flood just as you're allowed to ask questions about the Holocaust and know that there's not going to be a good answer out there for you. And that's what it is being a person of faith sometimes is to live with the questions even as you believe in God and in God's goodness and God's power and omniscience and omnipotence-- and-- hold these two things side by side.

BILL:

If God is omniscient, could he not have stopped--

BLU:

Yes, of--

BILL:

The Holocaust?

BLU:

Certainly.

FATHER:

Yes, yes. He could have.

BILL:

If God is omnipotent, did he not know --

BLU:

And yet it comes back to the question of human freedom again because the human beings carried out the Holocaust.

BURT:

That's-- that's why the flood story I think is-- is an even better story because there you can't in a way blame humans. It wasn't humans that opened up the heavens and the depths and flooded the world. It was God. God was completely in control there. I'm with Blu on this-- you know, as a Jew I also happen to read the Hebrew Bible and see it as my people's history and it makes me furious. And I think that God-- one of the great things about God in my life is that because God is God, God can endure my anger. That-- for me to repress the anger.

(OVERTALK)

BILL:

Yeah, now but can we endure God's anger?

SAM:

All of this let's me know that I don't have a clue as to how wise and how great and how well informed God is.

BURT:

I'm with you on that. I think God has space enough for my anger.

SAM:

And I can't be quite so presumptuous as to say, "Why would God do this or do that?" If God have us the freedom, we're free to do the ugliest and meanest things possible to one another. But then ~~there's~~ there's God who calls us back, haunts us like the hound of heaven with un-hurrying pace God is on our case. And God sets the bow in the cloud, promise new beginnings and life is all about new beginnings, you know.

KAREN:

I-- I think sometimes though you have to look at the catastrophic side of things like the flood, like the Holocaust, if-- even if only to shock us out of our sometimes simplistic notions of God--

SAM:

I agree.

KAREN:

-- that bring him into our corner of the world and-- and not into other people's corner-- For example, for-- I-- I think we've all got a lot of

KAREN (CONT'D):

thinking to do after the Holocaust, Christians and Jews from very different perspectives. Old ideas of God being totally omnipotent, totally benevolent at the same time-- are difficult to sustain when you look at this. But we should take in this difficulty and not jump to a Pollyanna situation. Now I like that story in the-- that Auschwitz story, where a group of Jews sat around and put God on trial for what was happening and said that they could find no exonerating clause what so ever. There's no excuse for this at all and that he was worthy to die; they sentenced him to death. And at the end of the trial, the rabbi said, "The trial has ended. It is time for the evening prayer."

BLU :

Prayer. Right.

KAREN :

That the struggle to understand must continue, but to back out of the struggle and say that there is no problem or that there's just the rainbow-- I think is-- is--losing the whole challenge.

SAM:

Not-- not just a rainbow. Black people could have put God on trial, but instead we put White supremacy on trial. We didn't put God on trial for slavery. We put people on trial for slavery, who had gone off and colonized other people all over the world. All of Europe owned all of the dark and brown and yellow people of the whole world. We didn't blame God for that. People had gunpowder and ships and they went out and did it, and they used their freedom. But then there's time here that can correct these things. I sit here with you right now with all of this ugly news all around us. With-- within my heart the notion of a complete and new and genuine community. I'm living with that bow in the cloud right now. And if I'm the last optimist left, I don't mind that at all.

KAREN:

Okay, you have the bow in the cloud, but you also this extremely depressing story about Noah and Canaan.

SAM:

Yes.

KAREN:

And I think that--

BILL:

Which is-- tell-- just summarize that story.

KAREN:

Noah, after he's planted his vineyard and-- he gets drunk.

SAM:

Yes.

KAREN:

He falls into a drunken stupor. And then when he finds out what has happened, that he's-- that Hamm looked upon him without covering his father's nakedness, he curses. Not even Hamm -- he curses his son Canaan. He's project-- there's no--

BILL:

His own grandson.

KAREN:

Yes, his own grandson. Yes, Hamm's son. He's-- he's not looking who-- whose fault was it that I was exposed in this way? Mine. No, he's projecting -- projecting out. And so he-- he's doing becoming a mini god. He's a damaged survivor, he's becoming a mini god, and he's]

KAREN (CONT'D):

cursing Canaan and leading the way for the new massacres of Joshua. So you come out of the ark a damaged survivor for the all the reasons we've talked about, and what do you do? You lay the seeds for a new catastrophe, a new massacre, a new holocaust.

BURT:

~~people~~ So Noah learned nothing from the whole thing?

KAREN:

No.

CAROL:

God learned. God learns from this.

BILL:

What did God learn?

CAROL:

God learns that-- that you have to work out problems in-- he makes a covenant that you work out problems in relationship. It's not by turning your back on your creation and saying "I regret. I'm going to start all over again." That it-- you are in life, you're in time, you're in relationship, and that's how you have to work out your-- work through your problems.

SAM:

Never do it again.

CAROL:

And you could say to the seventh generation, which is Karen's point, that it doesn't work out easily that there isn't a simple solution to difficult problems in human life, to problems in relationship, whether it's between God and-- and people or whether it's in marriage or whether it's in families, that these things work out slowly, difficultly, through time, and--

BILL:

What is--

CAROL:

And the damage you can't just undo.

KAREN:

No.

CAROL:

The damage in Noah, I mean, I think that's the power of righteous men in his generation, is-- he was the kind of righteousness that was righteous in his generation came at such human cost. This is a terrible story of Noah, but it's an extremely important story. And we live in a culture that

CAROL (CONT'D):

says "if you don't like it, leave, separate. You know, independence, go off, build a little ark, take care of yourself." This is why I think the book of Noah is extremely important, because it shows the cost of doing that.

BLU:

I feel personally the Noah story has a good deal of tragedy to it, flawed over-reaction, God's mistakes, human, you know, lack of caring, etc. But I come out of the story as this is a change for the better. It's a change for the better, I think, in the history of humanity in relationship to God, and it's a change for the better in terms of my own relationship with God.

BILL:

Huh. Why?

BLU:

It paves the way for an ongoing relationship. God doesn't expect perfection. God expects goodness in human beings, God holds human beings accountable. But doesn't-- it will never destroy them for errors or falling off the path. Even won't destroy them for acts of evil. And that's a very important

BLU (CONT'D):

-- that sustains the relationship. How can you have a relationship if you feel "BAM" (PH) every time you step out of line? Secondly, it's the covenant with all humanity, it paves the way for all other particularist covenants. God remembers how much God loves humanity, is-- is dependent on them, needs the relationship. And that's something that I, you know, I have to keep in my own life for--

CAROL:

Blu, I said--

BLU:

--for a relationship with God.

CAROL:

I mean, I-- I'm not I said-- I-- I thought it for God it was-- this was a story about-- of-- of education or development whatever of God.

BLU:

About the maturation of God.

CAROL:

The maturation of God, the coming into a relationship of God, seeing what it means to be in relationship. He learned, in a sense, from his

CAROL (CONT'D):

creation, which is to be really in relationship. But I thought for Noah, I mean, that he was a righteous man in his time at the beginning. But the word righteous disappears from this text.

BILL:

Could this be -- and let's talk for a moment -- could this be because he is a survivor? I-- I brought this-- description by Elie Wiesel-- a survivor. "April 11th, 1945. Buchenwald. Hungry, emaciated, sick and weakened by fear and terror, Jewish inmates welcome their sudden freedom in a strange manner. They do not grab the food offered by the American liberators. Instead, they gather in circles and pray. Their first act as free human beings was to say Kaddish, thus glorifying and sanctifying God's name." I thought of-- of Noah, coming off that Ark. Forget everything else we've said about Noah for the moment, but when he gets off the Ark, the first thing he does is an act of worship.

BLU:

He does. It's-- it's just incredible, how-- And I look at survivors' lives-- I-- I'm blessed with

BLU (CONT'D):

knowing many survivors in my own community, and through my work, my husband's work. And the-- the ability-- the capacity of human beings to build second lives, and to go on. Not to give up all hope, and all faith, and-- and to still believe in humanity.

BILL:

Do you believe in humanity?

BLU:

Yes, I believe in humanity.

BILL:

Then, what does that mean? You don't believe in-- in-- in--

FATHER:

Because God does.

BLU:

And I-- because you can see the good in humanity. And I look at survivors' lives and I can understand, you know. I never could understand the genealogy, the lushness of the genealogy at the end of the story of Noah. It's-- it almost seems inappropriate. And yet, as I look at Jewish life after the Holocaust, I can-- I understand it.

BLU (CONT'D):

That--

BILL:

What do you mean?

BLU:

The amazing assertion of life forces. Life affirmation-- the highest birthrate in Jewish history was in the DP camps after the Holocaust.

~~That~~ To me, that's an incredible statement about human beings choosing life, loving life, wanting to go on with a relationship with other human beings, wanting to continue the relationship with God. A personal relationship.

BILL:

I can understand that. But you-- it-- doesn't that happen only because you can-- you do not answer the question, where was God? You ask it, but you don't answer it. Does anyone answer that question?

KAREN:

I think that my-- one of my problems with Noah is that perhaps when he got out of the Ark, and saw this mess, saw these bloated bodies, saw this absolutely catastrophically damaged universe,

KAREN (CONT'D):

perhaps there should have been just a certain silence. It's different with the Holocaust in one respect, in that it's not-- it was Hitler that put the people into the camps, not God. Now, just for Noah to walk out of that Ark, and immediately offer-- in a m-- in a sort of knee-jerk way-- offer a sacrifice-- in the midst of this carnage, this slaughter, this absolute catastrophe of a total holocaust.

BILL:

Which had been caused by God.

KAREN:

Which had been caused by God. This was not the moment to offer a sacrifice of praise. And I don't like this image of God snuffing this sweet smell. It reminds me too much of those-- those pagan deities-- in Lucretius, (PH) snuffing up the smell o-- of-- o-- of-- people's sacrifices, and utterly careless-- utterly indifferent-- to human suffering and human pain.

BURT:

I'm not so sure that Noah was so mindless when he offered a sacrifice. But I think we m-- we may

BURT (CONT'D):

be-- in error, if we think that the sacrifice was offered in love and praise. Noah just witnessed, in the most awesome of ways, how terrifying God can be. And I think as soon as he got off that boat, the first thing he was (LAUGHS) gonna do was propitiate God in the best way-- the best way possible. There's real terror. And that's something we don't often contend with, is terror of God. There are-- there's more than one way to approach God. Yes, we can approach God with love. But awe, trembling, fear-- those are real ways of dealing with something that is-- the creator of the universe, something wholly other-- something terrifying.

BILL:

Through the story of Genesis, isn't it so? That God asks less of love than he does of obedience? That he wants awe from us, not necessarily affection.

FATHER:

But there is a subtle irony in these stories that we shouldn't miss. And that's why I always insist, let's stay with the story. And the subtle

FATHER (CONT'D):

irony is that human beings-- there is hope. God doesn't give up on them because of this, the covenant, and their fertility after the colossal destruction of the flood. The new creation. God's breath blows over the waters and dries them up. Exact reflection of Genesis 1, 2, where God's wind creates this marvelous universe that we now have. And-- and the other point, with regard to the nature of God. It's very important to have God talk, otherwise we wouldn't have any th-- theology. You and I, and you would probably be out of a job. But, we got to be careful that faith is not necessarily God-talk. Faith means, belief in a transcendent being. And we look at other parts of the Bible. We see God is essentially mysterious. He says to one of his chosen ones, "My name is mysterious." Name means that-- my very essence is mysterious. God is unspeakable. But that doesn't mean God cannot relate to people. If we looked at various affirmations about God in the Old Testament, we will see there, as complicated as it is, that there is a God that I can relate to in faith. A

FATHER (CONT'D):

God who often decides to relate to me in silence.

That does not mean absence.