

We focus this week on one verse, Genesis 8:21, and on the verse itself rather than on commentaries.

"Vayorach HaShem et reiach hanichoach vayomer HaShem el libo lo osif od l'kallel et hoadomo baavur ho'odom ki yeitzer leiv ho'odom ra mineurav v'lo osif od l'hakot et kol chai kaasher asiti"  
Tentative translation

"G-d smelled the pleasant smell (of Noach's animal sacrifices). He said to Himself: 'I will not continue cursing the ground because of humanity, as the inclination of its heart is bad from youth, and I will not continue to smite all life as I have done.'"

This translation glosses over or biases many critical issues, but we'll use it as a frame of reference.

Questions:

1) Let us grant that "smell the pleasant smell" is a metaphor for accepting the sacrifice that Noach brings upon leaving the ark. What connection does this have to G-d's statement?

Two points of note:

One) Noach brings sacrifices only from the animals that are "tahor", probably the equivalent of what later becomes the kashrut criteria

Two) The verse has its own "because" statement later (ki yetzer etc.), so the opening phrase, if expressing a cause, seems redundant.

2) Why does G-d begin by referring to the curse of the adomoh, and mention the wiping out of all life as a seeming afterthought?

3) Why does man's inclination being evil from birth yield the result that G-d does not punish and curse in the same way as before? Was this not true before the flood?

[On this see perhaps Seforno's claim that human nature in fact changed for the worse, and Saadia Gaon's contention that the verse should be translated "even though the inclination etc". The same result can be arrived at, perhaps more convincingly, by translating as "just because the inclination etc."

I offer the following thesis as a stimulant to thought. What this verse does is not to offer a guarantee to man, but rather to decouple man and the rest of Creation. G-d promises that the land will no longer be cursed because of humanity (in Onkelos, "because of the sins of humanity"), and that he will no longer wipe out all life; the fate of humanity itself is nowhere assured.

I suggest reading 8:22 - 9:18.

Thanks to all who responded last week to my request for feedback, and especially to those who responded substantively to the content.. If you do read these, and didn't have a chance to respond last week, I'd again appreciate feedback as to how you use these and what kinds of things work best, so that I can make it as useful as possible.

Shabbat Shalom!