

GENESIS 5:29 IN RELATION TO GENESIS 3:15
IN THE DEVELOPING NARRATIVE
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Following the protoevangelium (Gen 3:15), the Bible begins tracking the promise of the Coming One who will restore God's created order of Genesis 1:26-28. In an effort to demonstrate this, consider Lamech's words in Genesis 5:29:

וַיִּקְרָא אֶת־שְׁמוֹ נֹחַ לְאמֹר זֶה יִנְחֵמֵנוּ מִכָּל־עֲשָׂוֵנוּ וּמִכָּל־צָרָה וּמִן־הַאֲדָרָמָה
אֲשֶׁר אֶרְרָה יְהוָה

LXX - Gen. 5:29 καὶ ἐπωνόμασεν τὸ ὄνομα αὐτοῦ Νωε λέγων Οὗτος διαναπαύσει ἡμᾶς ἀπὸ τῶν ἔργων ἡμῶν καὶ ἀπὸ τῶν λυπῶν τῶν χειρῶν ἡμῶν καὶ ἀπὸ τῆς γῆς, ἧς κατηράσατο κύριος ὁ θεός.

Textual Issues

This verse has one key textual issue and several interpretive questions that must be worked through. As seen above, the LXX reads διαναπαύσει for יִנְחֵמֵנוּ, suggesting that both the name and the explanation of it come from the same root נח, “rest.” However, as the text stands in the MT the name “Noah” does not match the explanation of the name (from the verb נחם, “to comfort”). For this reason, some have been persuaded that the MT should be emended. Yet, there are three ways to emend the text of this verse. First, the name נח is correct but the verb יִנְחֵמֵנוּ should be יְנַחֵמֵנוּ (this view finds the textual support shown above in the LXX). Second, the verb יִנְחֵמֵנוּ is correct but the name נח is incorrect and should instead be from the root נחם. However, there is no textual evidence for such a conclusion. Third, the MT is correct as it stands.

In an effort to adjudicate the situation several factors must be considered. First, some reasonable explanation of the name of Lamech's son, whether נח or from the root נחם, must be explained. E. G. Kraeling begins his discussion of this issue at the point where Old Testament scholarship had taken him in his day:

Within the Priestly genealogy of the Sethites in Gen. 5, verse 29 appears as a precious nugget from an older source. The author, doubtless the Jahwist, presents us with an interesting explanation of the name Noah. According to the MT it combined with the root *nih(h)am'* comfort. 'Ancient Rabbis like Johanan and Simeon b. Lakish already objected to this etymology and claimed that 'Noah' ought to be derived from *nuah*, or that the name ought to be Nahman instead of Noah. (Goldziher, "Zur Geschichte der Etymologie des Namens Noah," Zeitschr. d. Deutschen Morgenland. Ges., 1870, 207f. Cp. *Bereshith Rabbba*, Sec. 25.) We may note, too, that the etymology cited in Enoch 106₁₈ is also operates with the Hiphil of *nuah*, in the secondary meaning 'to be left over.' An emendation of the

text to *jenihenu*‘ he will cause us to rest ’is indeed necessary, for it seems incredible that the Jahwist should have gone out of his way to avoid the verb *nuah*. Furthermore, the *διαναπαύσει* of the LXX indicates that the form *jenahemenu* did not come into our MT until the late Jewish period. In our opinion this change occurred in the interest of Messianic prophecy. We need only remind the reader of the importance of the idea of ‘comfort ’of Israel from the time of Deutero-Isaiah on. ‘This one will comfort us ’immediately suggested the Messiah. (E. G. Kraeling, “The Interpretation of the Name Noah in Gen. 5:29,” JBL 48, Vol.3, 138-43).

Interestingly the primary source of Kraeling’s rejection of reading “comfort” for both the name and the explanation is not the lack of textual evidence, but his presupposition that Messianic expectation is late (i.e., the use of “comfort” from the time of Deutero-Isaiah) and is to thus be rejected. After Kraeling rejects via his presuppositions even the possibility that “comfort” is indeed the correct verb, he then states, “since the flood story is clearly of Babylonian origin the name of the hero of the flood ought to be Babylonian.” (Kraeling, 139) He continues, “but when we turn to the Babylonian sources we find that the flood-hero bore the old Sumerian name Zi-u(d)-sud-ra.” (Kraeling, 139) Then, after launching into a discussion of Babylonian and Hellenistic flood stories and the Sumerian and Akkadian languages, he poses the question, “what is the relation of the name Noah to Ziusudra?” His response: “We saw that the latter originated in the story concerning the attainment of immortality on the part of the flood hero. May not the same thing apply to the name Noah?” Thus, Kraeling concludes:

At all events, if we identify the infant Noah with the infant sun god, as is suggested by Enoch, the whole matter is plain, for as Norden has shown the birth of the god of light is associated with the winter solstice. [Norden, *Die Geburt des Kindes*, 1924, 14f] The Canaanitic or early Hebrew farmer could regard the solstice as ushering in his season of rest after the toil of spring, summer, and autumn. Mythically speaking it was the birth of the solar babe that brought him relief. (Kraeling, 142-43).

Kraeling never tries to explain why the story of Noah is in Genesis. Because of his source critical presuppositions, he sees no need to even try. Instead, his goal seems only to explain the origin of the text behind the text and its connection to the Hebrew farmer living in the land. Yet, if the notion that some kind of unity of the text is actually possible then one must ask why Lamech’s statement concerning the birth of his son is included in Genesis 5:29. It must have some purpose or function in the text of Genesis.

One valid point that Kraeling makes in his article that is worth pointing out is that the OT never makes any connection between the effects of wine and “rest” for humanity (Heb. root נָוַח).¹ Moreover, Hamilton correctly points out, “The suggestion to emend MT and make it conform to the LXX is ruled out by the fact that nowhere else in the OT do we find a direct

¹ In Numbers 15:7 and 11 “wine” (יין) is offered as a “soothing aroma” (ריח־ניחה) to the LORD.

object after the causative form of *nuah*. Instead, we would need a preposition following the verb.” (Hamilton, *The Book of Genesis: Chapters 1-17*, 258).

This introduces the second possible reading of the text. The more common approach is to accept the verb “comfort” and follow the line of argumentation first explained by Budde, which holds that Noah brought “comfort” not “rest” to humanity via his introduction of viticulture to humanity. If one believes that the name and the explanation should match, then this view would require changing the name to some form of the root. However, given the lack of textual witness this is a difficult argument to make. Therefore, one option remains: to leave the text as it reads in the MT. However, if this view is taken then Westermann rightly states, “the name has not been explained.” (Westermann, 360). The goal of this paper then is to 1) argue that the text of the MT is correct, 2) give an explanation of the name “Noah,” and 3) explain Genesis 5:29 more fully within the context of Genesis 1-9 and the Bible as a whole.

The Source of Lamech’s Expectation of Comfort and Noah’s Name

Now that the textual issues have been laid out above, the focus must turn to the issue of understanding exactly what Genesis 5:29 is saying. Upon consulting the various commentators, a few points seem unanimous. First, everyone acknowledges that Lamech was expecting some sort of relief from his son. Second, the relief that Lamech sought had some relation to the curse of Genesis 3:17.² For example, Ross states, “The name Noah is also the basis for the motif of resting, in the next (toledot) section of the book. Life under the curse was very painful for these early bearers of the curse, and so Lamech hoped for relief and comfort through this man Noah.” (Ross, *Creation and Blessing*, 176). Likewise, Keil and Delitzsch explain:

Noah, נֹחַ from נָח to rest and הַנְחִיחַ to bring rest, is explained by ... to comfort, in the sense of helpful remedial consolation. Lamech not only felt the burden of his work upon the ground which God had cursed, but looked forward with a prophetic presentiment to the time when the existing misery and corruption would terminate and a change for the better, a redemption from the curse, would come. This presentiment assumed the form of hope when his son was born; he therefore gave expression to it in his name. But his hope was not realized, at least not in the way that he desired.” (Keil and Delitzsch, *Commentary on the Old Testament*, Vol. 1, 126-7).

However, the source of Lamech’s expectation or the reason that the name given does not match the explanation provided. Hamilton explains the dilemma:

Lamech is the only father in this chapter who provides an explanation of his son’s name...The problem here is that the explanation does not fit the name...Nor does the name correspond to the explanation...Nor is it helpful to avoid the explanation

² This is most easily demonstrated by the fact that the form עֲצַבָּן is used only three times in the Bible (3:16, 17, and 5:29). Moreover, Lamech directly references the ground which the LORD had cursed.

completely and simply take Noah to mean ‘pleasant (or pleasing) man.’...Perhaps the relief that is found here, if any, is the renewed gift of the vine (9:20) and the introduction of viticulture, indicating a lifting of God’s curse on the ground. Does Lamech already see the possibilities that his son will be a second Adam? Or should we understand Lamech’s words not as insight into the future but as a desperate call and hope for some kind of relief from the life of misery and servitude? In other words, is he speaking indicatively or subjunctively? (Hamilton, 258-59).

Likewise, speaking on Genesis 5:29 Waltke states, “whereas the Cainite Lamech sought to redress wrong through revenge (see 4:24), the Sethite Lamech looks for deliverance from the curse. Noah fulfills the prophecy by beginning viticulture and viniculture (see 9:20).” (Waltke, *Genesis*, 115).

It appears that in centuries past it was more in vogue to see Lamech’s words as voicing his Messianic expectation. For example, Chandlish explains:

...the name (Noah) signifies ‘comfort ’or ‘consolation; ’and certainly at the time the righteous family needed consolation. The delay of salvation and the wide prevalence of evil tried their patience, and embittered all their toil. Nevertheless against hope they continued to believe in hope; and remembering the promise about the seed of the woman, they hailed this new heir of it as the harbinger of better days. In their expectations, they probably dwelt upon the time, when the curse being taken away, the face of the earth would be renewed (Ps. civ. 30); for they said of Noah, interpreting his name as prophetic, ‘This same shall comfort us concerning our work and the toil of our hands, because of the ground which the Lord hath cursed ’(ver. 28,29). (Chandlish, *Commentary on Genesis*, 116).

However, not all held such a view as John Calvin makes clear in his statement, “some suppose him [Lamech, concerning his expectation of deliverance from the curse of 3:17] to have been deceived, inasmuch as he believed that Noah was the Christ; but they adduce no rational conjecture in support of the opinion.” (Calvin, *Genesis*, 234). Calvin’s point is well taken. While some have argued that Lamech is expressing a Messianic expectation, they give little reason for such a conclusion. Moreover, they fail to explain how it is that Noah brought any rest at all.

Genesis 2:15 may give us a clue as to why Lamech named Noah as he did. Ross explains, “The vocabulary in verses 15-17 strikingly points to the spiritual nature of the man’s responsibility. First, the word translated ‘placed ’is actually from the word ‘rest ’(*nuah*). It means, ‘placed ’in the passage, but the choice of a word with overtones of ‘rest ’is important (cf. *sim*, ‘put, ’in 2:8). The word is cognate to ‘rest ’(*m^enuha*), which is used in Psalm 95:11 to refer to rest in the Promised Land. Genesis 2:15 thus must have some connection with the biblical teaching of Sabbath rest in the Bible (see vv. 1-3 and Heb. 3:7-4:11).” (Ross, 124)³ Also commenting on

³ To Ross ’comment I would add that Isaiah 14:1-3 also connects the root נוח with the root עזב. Isaiah 14: בְּיוֹם הַגִּיחַ יְהוָה לִּי מֵעֶצְבֶּךָ וּמִרְגָזֶךָ וּמִזֶּה־הַעֲבֹדָה הַקָּשָׁה אֲשֶׁר עָבַדְתָּךָ

2:15-17 Keil and Delitzsch state, “after the preparation of the garden in Eden God placed the man there, to dress it and to keep it. וַיִּצְוֵהוּ not merely expresses removal thither, but the fact that the man was placed there to lead a life of repose, not indeed in inactivity, but in fulfillment of the course assigned him, which was very different from the trouble and restlessness of the weary toil into which he was plunged by sin.” (Keil and Delitzsch, 84)

While it is true that Genesis 2:15 is stating the same basic point as 2:8, there are two noticeable differences. First, different verbs are used. Second, Genesis 2:15 spells out what the responsibilities of the man will be after he has been ‘placed’ or ‘rested’ in the garden. The additional information provided in the second half of 2:15 stands in contrast to the עֲבֹדָה of the curse. Thus, Lamech desired to have the cursed conditions of 3:17 removed and the restful conditions of 2:15 restored. Unfortunately, Lamech’s desire was not fulfilled through his son Noah. Instead, a great irony is presented in Genesis 6-9. This raises the last issue to be considered in this brief explanation of Genesis 5:29: what was the exact identity of the “comfort” or “rest” that Noah brought to humanity, if any?

The Identity of the Rest/Comfort that Noah Provided

As stated above, the notion that Noah’s discovery of wine being the ‘comfort’ in view in Genesis 5:29 goes back to Budde’s connection between Genesis 9:20 (“Noah, a man of the ground, began and he planted a vineyard.”) and Jeremiah 16:7 (“They will not break bread in mourning for them, to comfort anyone over the dead, nor will they give a cup of consolation to drink for anyone’s father or mother.”).⁴ Commenting on Genesis 5:29 Westermann states, “...the relief that Noah brought cannot be anything else than the beginning of viticulture, inasmuch as it is so closely connected with the cursing of the ground and the burden of work which is its consequence.” (Westerman, 360). While Westermann also states, “the name [of Noah] cannot be explained...” (Westerman, 360), he continues by concluding:

one can presume then an older form lay behind 5:29: ‘Who will bring us comfort in (from) our work. ’This recollection of Gen 3:17, ‘and from the toil of our hands from the earth that Yahweh has cursed. ’The elaboration sounds awkward; it seems to be the work of someone in the tradition who wanted to establish a connection with Gen 3:17. The explanation of the name then must be understood without the elaboration. It is to be seen in the context in which the Old Testament speaks of wine in other places: ‘Wine to gladden the heart of man’ Ps 104:15 (likewise 9:13); cf. Sir 35:27f.; especially Prov 31:6f...H. Gunkel refers to the custom of offering a cup of consolation to a mourner when someone has died, Jer 16:7. What is in mind here is the rhythm of work and celebration; and the discovery of the vine has provided hard-working people with a bringer of joy. This explanation is supported further by the addition that refers to Gen 3:17: it is

⁴ Budde, *Biblische Urgeschichte*, 1883, 306f.

the earth cursed by God that makes daily work a burden. But this same earth by producing the vine provides for relaxation, relief and refreshment.” (Westerman, 360).

However, the connection of Noah to viticulture comes via 9:20. Yet, are we really to consult the “context in which the Old Testament speaks of wine in other places” and ignore the next four verses that follow Genesis 9:20? The wine which Noah drinks does not leave him relaxed, relieved, and refreshed. Instead, it leaves him drunk, naked, and in need of covering. Does that not sound eerily familiar to Adam’s fallen state of affairs (naked, ashamed, and in need of covering)? Moreover, just as the result of Adam’s failure leads to cursing, Noah’s drunkenness leads to the cursing of his son Ham. In short, drunkenness, nakedness, and cursing is hardly a recipe for bringing comfort to humanity.

Even though Kraeling is persuaded that the original text does not read “comfort,” he correctly argues, “...even if ‘he will comfort us ’were original we must consider that interpretation far fetched.” (Kraeling, 139) While Budde argues that the verse refers to the “cup of consolation” in Jeremiah 16:7, Kraeling states:

...the cup of consolation gets its name, not from the effect of the wine, but rather from the fact that it is offered to the mourner by those striving to console him. As Prov. 31:6-7 shows, wine can help a man forget his troubles, and this clearly is the purpose of the ‘cup of consolation ’...It seems unnatural to suppose that the disgraceful occasion related in Gen. 9:20f should have suggested the ‘cup of comfort ’or that the author should have uttered the pious words of 5:29 with that particular anecdote prominently in mind. (Kraeling, 139).

In other words, getting drunk to forget one’s toil is hardly a solution nor is it condoned anywhere in the Bible.

Coming to a different conclusion about the identity of Noah’s comfort, Leupold states:

the name Noah was to remind of the comfort this man would bring. By the spirit of prophecy Lamech, like other godly patriarchs, sensed that in an unusual way this one would bring comfort to the troubled race. In reality Noah did this by preserving the small godly remnant in the ark. This unusual form of the comfort Lamech may never have dreamed of. Yet his prophecy is a valid one. No doubt, in expressing it he had hoped for much more. His prophecy, however, may meet its highest fulfillment in the removal of the curse from the earth, which removal came after the flood, 8:21f. (Leupold, 245-46).

However, after reading Leupold’s explanation one is left wondering how it was that the curse was removed via the flood.

Proposed Solution

It was the expectation of Lamech that his son would be the Promised One through whom the curse of 3:17 would be removed. If the text is read as it stands then the only textual reason for such an expectation looks back to Genesis 3:15. Moreover, if Lamech desired that the Genesis 3:17 curse be removed, then he hoped for the situation that existed before the fall. If this is the case then Genesis 2:15, better than any other verse before chapter three, explains Adam's life in the Garden of Eden before the fall. Thus, it seems reasonable that Lamech looked forward to the removal of the Genesis 3:17 curse and the restoration of the rest described in Genesis 2:15. To be sure, Adam's assignment had not changed. He was still to "serve" or "cultivate" that land (cf. 2:15 and 3:23).⁵ However, the curse had devastating effects of the effort required. Thus, his desire for the conditions in the garden to be restored most naturally find their expression in the name "Noah." It was for this reason then that Lamech makes the statement that he does in 5:29 concerning his son.

(Gen. 2:15) וַיִּקַּח יְהוָה אֱלֹהִים אֶת-הָאָדָם וַיִּנְתְּהוּ בְּגֶן-עֵדֶן לְעִבְדָּהּ וּלְשִׁמְרָהּ

(Gen. 3:17) וּלְאָדָם אָמַר כִּי-שָׁמַעְתָּ לְקוֹל אִשְׁתְּךָ וַתֹּאכַל מִן-הָעֵץ אֲשֶׁר צִוִּיתִיךָ לֵאמֹר

לֹא תֹאכַל מִמֶּנּוּ אֲרוּרָה הָאָדָמָה בְּעִבּוּרָךָ בְּעִצְבוֹן תֹּאכְלֶנָּה כָּל יְמֵי חַיֶּיךָ

(Gen. 5:29) וַיִּקְרָא אֶת-שְׁמוֹ נֹחַ לֵאמֹר זֶה יִנְחַמֵּנוּ מִכָּל-עֲשׂוֹנוֹ וּמִכָּל-עִצְבוֹן יְדֵינוּ מִן-הָאָדָמָה אֲשֶׁר אָרְרָה יְהוָה

Ironically, Lamech's expectation for comfort from the curse does not come to humanity through Noah. Instead, his words in 5:29 are turned on their head in Genesis 6:6. Commenting on Genesis 5:29, Ross states, "Lamech had no idea how God would turn these words around and fulfill the wish in His own way (cf. comments on 6:5-8)." (Ross, Genesis in BKC, 36)

(Gen. 6:6) וַיִּנְחַם יְהוָה כִּי-עָשָׂה אֶת-הָאָדָם בְּאָרֶץ וַיִּתְעַצֵּב אֵל-לִבּוֹ

In 5:29 Lamech calls the name of his son Noah (נוח, from 2:15) saying, "This one will give us comfort (*piel* of נחם) from our work (from עשה) and from the toil (עצבון) of our hands from the ground (הארמה) which the LORD cursed (ארר)." In 6:6 we read that the LORD was sorry (*niphil* of נחם) because he made (עשה) man (האדם) and was grieved (עצב) in his heart (לבו).

⁵ One note of interest by way of observation is that in 2:15 Adam was "placed/rested" in the garden of Eden to "serve" and "keep/guard" it. However, in 3:23 Adam is sent out from the garden to "serve" the ground. In 3:24, the cherubim and flaming sword are "caused to dwell" east of the garden to "guard" the way back to the tree of life. In other words, it appears that man's job was to guard the garden. After his failure to do so, those duties were removed from him.

In the end, Noah did not bring comfort to humanity. However, Noah did bring comfort to the heart of the LORD through the 'soothing aroma' of his sacrifice. After the flood waters recede, Noah, in 8:21 offers a sacrifice to the LORD. In 1913 Procksch recognized the connection between Noah's name and the sacrifice that Noah makes to the LORD. (Procksch, *Die Genesis*, 1913, 56.) What began with the LORD being grieved in His heart (אֱלֹהִים לָבוֹ) leading to His determination to wipe out man from the earth ends with a resolve in His heart (אֱלֹהִים לָבוֹ) to never again wipe out man from the earth. Note that it was the soothing aroma (רִיח־הַנִּיחֹחַ, from נוֹחַ) offered by Noah that causes a response from the LORD. Namely, the LORD said to his heart (לָבוֹ) that he would not curse (קָלַל instead of אָרַר) again the earth (הָאָרֶץ) and all the living things that the LORD had made (עֲשָׂה) again because of man (הָאָדָם).

(Gen. 8:21) וַיִּרַח יְהוָה אֶת־רִיחַ הַנִּיחֹחַ וַיֵּאמֶר יְהוָה אֱלֹהִים לָבוֹ לֹא־אֶסְרָךְ לְקַלְלֵךְ עוֹד אֶת־הָאָרֶץ בְּעִבּוֹר הָאָדָם כִּי יֵצֵר לִבְ הָאָדָם רָע מִנְעֻרָיו וְלֹא־אֶסְרָךְ עוֹד לְהַכּוֹת אֶת־כָּל־חַי כַּאֲשֶׁר עָשִׂיתִי

Conclusion

The job of the *reader* of Genesis is to *read Genesis*. If the book is not read as it stands, but is instead deconstructed via source criticism, recontextualized via importing every myth of the ANE into the book to arrive at the "real" historical context and meaning, and then marginalized as not being the revelation of God but just another mere work of men, then how can *any text*, when treated in such a manner, possibly have a chance to speak for itself? Instead, it will only be allowed to say what the last critical method applied to it determines that it can say. Surely other ANE texts are valuable in helping us understand how words were and could be used. However, even this is only possible if those texts are read! If there is a "historical context" available to us, it is because there was first a literary context provided to us to read. I am convinced that when the book of Genesis is allowed to be read as if it has something to say then it will indeed speak. And, out from the testimony of the Old Testament will walk Jesus of Nazareth, son of David, son of Abraham, the Promised One that Lamech anticipated who will indeed bring rest to humanity and all creation.