

CENTRAL THEMES IN THE BIBLE

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Fall 2004 Central Themes in the Old Testament

- Nov. 4 Creation and Fall, continued
The Proliferation of Evil and the Great Flood
Reading: Genesis 4-8
A New Beginning: The Noachic Covenant; the Continuing Challenge of Evil – the Sin of Ham, the Fragmentation of the Human Race, the Tower of Babel; the genealogy of Abraham
Reading: Genesis 9-11

GENESIS 4-11 (Septuagint Version)

Genesis 4-5 – Cain and Abel; the Cain Line and the Seth Line

Cain and Abel

- [4:1] And Adam knew Eve his wife, and she conceived and brought forth Cain and said I have gained a man through God.
[4:2] And she again bore his brother Abel. And Abel was a keeper of sheep, but Cain was a tiller of the ground.
[4:3] And it was so after some time [after days] that Cain brought of the fruits of the earth a sacrifice to the Lord.
[4:4] And Abel also brought of the firstborn of his sheep and of his fatlings and God looked upon Abel and his gifts,
[4:5] but Cain and his sacrifices he [God] regarded not, and Cain was exceedingly sorrowful [angry], and his countenance fell.
[4:6] And the Lord God said to Cain, Why art thou become very sorrowful and why is thy countenance fallen?
[4:7] Hast thou not sinned if thou hast brought it rightly, but not rightly divided it? Be still, to thee shall be his [sin's] submission [desire], and thou shalt rule over him [sin]. (NKJV: [4:7] "If you do well, will you not be accepted? And if you do not do well, sin lies at the door. And its desire is for you, but you should rule over it.")

The first murder

- [4:8] And Cain said to Abel his brother, Let us go out into the plain; and it came to pass that when they were in the plain Cain rose up against Abel his brother and slew him.
[4:9] And the Lord God said to Cain, Where is Abel thy brother? and he said, I know not, am I my brother's keeper?
[4:10] And the Lord said, What hast thou done? the voice of thy brother's blood cries to me out of the ground.
[4:11] And now thou art cursed from the earth which has opened her mouth to receive thy brother's blood from thy hand.
[4:12] When thou tillest the earth, then it shall not continue to give its strength to thee: thou shalt be groaning and trembling on the earth.

The biblical account of man's expulsion from God's paradise (in Gen. 3) is followed immediately by the story of the first murder (4:1-16). Cain, the first son of Adam and Eve, slays his younger brother Abel. Without going into the details of this section of Genesis, we may say that "man's revolt against God leads to his revolt against his fellow man; the crime of murder confirms the fallen state of man" (*Jerome Biblical Commentary*).

Cain is cast out

- [4:13] And Cain said to the Lord God, My crime is too great for me to be forgiven. [Repentence?]
[4:14] If thou castest me out this day from the face of the earth, [then] I shall be hidden from thy presence, and I shall be groaning and trembling upon the earth, then it will be that any one that finds me shall slay me.
[4:15] And the Lord God said to him, Not so. Any one that [who] slays Cain shall suffer seven-fold vengeance [pay seven penalties]; and the Lord God set a mark upon Cain that no one that found him might slay him. [God's mercy on Cain?]
[4:16] So Cain went forth from the presence of God and dwelt in the land of Nod over against Edem [Eden]. [But Cain's heinous sin alienates him from the presence of God.]

After murdering his brother, Cain is removed still further from the presence of God. He is sent off, away from his parents, to "the land of Nod, on the east of Eden" (Gen. 4:16, NKJV). The human race is, at this point, divided into two parts, as is indicated in the two genealogies in Genesis 4-5. A distinction is made here between the "Cain line" (4:17-24) and the "Seth line" (4:25-5:32). The Cain line is characterized by the cries of vengeance and the murderous acts of Cain himself and of his great-great-great-grandson, Lamech (see 4:23-24). The Seth line – Seth was the third son of Adam and Eve (4:25) – is presented as the true line of descent from Adam (5:3) and is characterized by its initial holiness (5:18-24) and devotion to God (4:26). With the advent of Seth and his offspring, the sons of Adam "began to call on the name of the Lord" (4:26, NKJV). In other words, while the Cain line is cut off from "the generations of Adam" and steeped in evil, the Seth line is the legitimate continuation of Adam's seed and is oriented toward the worship of God.

The descendants of Cain – the Cain line

- [4:17] And Cain knew his wife [his sister?], and having conceived she bore Enoch; and he [Cain] built a city; and he named the city after the name of his son, Enoch.
[4:18] And to Enoch was born Gaidad; and Gaidad begot Maleleel; and Maleleel begot Mathusala; and Mathusala begot Lamech.
[4:19] And Lamech took to himself two wives; the name of the one was Ada, and the name of the second Sella.
[4:20] And Ada bore Jobel; he was the father of those that dwell in tents, feeding cattle.
[4:21] And the name of his brother was Jubal; he it was who invented [made known] the psaltry and harp.
[4:22] And Sella also bore Thobel; he was a smith, a manufacturer both of brass and iron: and the sister of Thobel was Noëma.
[4:23] And Lamech said to his wives, Ada and Sella, Hear my voice, ye wives of Lamech, consider my words, because I have slain a man to my sorrow and a youth to my grief. [Murder continues.]
[4:24] Because vengeance has been exacted seven times on Cain's behalf, on Lamech's it shall be seventy times seven.

The descendants of Adam and Eve through Seth – the Seth line

- [4:25] And Adam knew Eve his wife, and she conceived and bore a son, and called his name Seth, saying, For God has raised up to me another seed instead of Abel, whom Cain slew.
[4:26] And Seth had a son, and he called his name Enos: he [had faith to] call on the name of the Lord God.
[5:1] This is the genealogy of men in the day in which God made Adam; in the image of God he made him:
[5:2] male and female he made them, and blessed them; and he called his [their] name Adam [humankind], in the day in which he made them.
[5:3] And Adam lived two hundred and thirty years, and begot a son after his own form and after his own image, and he called his name Seth.

- [5:4] And the days of Adam, which he lived after his begetting Seth, were seven hundred years; and he begot sons and daughters.
- [5:5] And all the days of Adam which he lived were nine hundred and thirty years, and he died.
- [5:6] Now Seth lived two hundred and five years, and begot Enos.
- [5:7] And Seth lived after his begetting Enos, seven hundred and seven years, and he begot sons and daughters.
- [5:8] And all the days of Seth were nine hundred and twelve years, and he died.
- [5:9] And Enos lived an hundred and ninety years, and begot Cainan.
- [5:10] And Enos lived after his begetting Cainan, seven hundred and fifteen and he begot sons and daughters.
- [5:11] And all the days of Enos were nine hundred and five years, and he died.
- [5:12] And Cainan lived an hundred and seventy years, and he begot Maleleel.
- [5:13] And Cainan lived after his begetting Maleleel, seven hundred and forty years, and he begot son and daughters.
- [5:14] And all the days of Cainan were nine hundred and ten years, and he died.
- [5:15] And Maleleel lived an hundred and sixty and five years, and he begot Jared.
- [5:16] And Maleleel lived after his begetting Jared, seven hundred and thirty years, and he begot sons and daughters.
- [5:17] And all the days of Maleleel were eight hundred and ninety and five years, and he died.
- [5:18] And Jared lived an hundred and two years, and begot Enoch:
- [5:19] and Jared lived after his begetting Enoch, eight hundred years, and he begot sons and daughters.
- [5:20] And all the days of Jared were nine hundred and sixty and two years, and he died.
- [5:21] And Enoch lived an hundred and sixty and five years, and begat Mathusala.
- [5:22] And Enoch was well-pleasing to God after his begetting Mathusala, two hundred years, and he begot sons and daughters.
- [5:23] And all the days of Enoch were three hundred and sixty and five years.
- [5:24] And Enoch was well-pleasing to God, and was not found, because God translated him.
- [5:25] And Mathusala lived an hundred and sixty [or eighty, Alex.] and seven years and begot Lamech.
- [5:26] And Mathusala lived after his begetting Lamech eight hundred and two [Alex. 782] years, and begot sons and daughters.
- [5:27] And all the days of Mathusala which he lived, were nine hundred and sixty and nine years, and he died.
- [5:28] And Lamech lived an hundred and eighty and eight years, and begot a son.
- [5:29] And he called his name Noe [Noah], saying, This one will cause us to cease from our works, and from the toils of our hands, and from the earth, which the Lord God has cursed.
- [5:30] And Lamech lived after his begetting Noe, five hundred and sixty and five years, and begot sons and daughters.
- [5:31] And all the days of Lamech were seven hundred and fifty-three years, and he died.

Genesis 6-8:19 – The Proliferation of Evil and the Great Flood

Genesis 6 tells of the growing wickedness of the world in those days and of God's decision to destroy human civilization by sending a great deluge upon the earth. The chapter begins, in verses 1-4, with a strange and difficult passage:

The "sons of God" and the "daughters of men"

- [6:1] And Noe was five hundred years old, and he begot three sons, Sem [Shem], Cham [Ham], and Japheth.
- [6:2] And it came to pass when men began to be numerous upon the earth, and daughters were born to them,
- [6:3] that the sons [Alex. Angels] of God having seen the daughters of men that they were beautiful, took to themselves wives of all whom they chose.
- [6:4] And the Lord God said, My Spirit shall certainly not remain among these men for ever, because they are flesh, but their days shall be an hundred and twenty years.
- [6:5] Now the giants [Nephilim = mighty men] were upon the earth in those days; and after that when the sons of God were wont to go in to the daughters of men, they bore children to them, those were the giants [mighty men] of old, the men of renown.

Some interpreters have held that the "sons of God" referred to in this text were fallen angels (or demons) who married human women and "spawned a mixed race" of giants or monsters. But since angels and demons are pure spirits – who may appear in human form (see Gen. 18-19) but who cannot be actually "incarnate" in a material body – it is difficult to see how they could impregnate "the daughters of men." A more natural reading of the text would indicate that "the sons of God" were descendants of Seth who were guilty of intermarriage with women descended from Cain. From this point of view, the progeny of these unholy marriages are not giants or monsters, but "strong, violent, tyrannous men of great wickedness" (Harper). Given the emphasis upon the divinely ordained separation of the Cain and Seth lines in Genesis 4:17-5:32, the mixing of the two stocks would certainly be an abomination in the sight of God and a fitting introduction to the tale of corruption, judgment, and catastrophe that follows in Genesis 6:6-7:24.

God's judgment on the wickedness of the human race

- [6:6] And the Lord God having seen that the wicked actions of men were multiplied upon the earth, and that every one in his heart was intently brooding over evil continually,
- [6:7] then God laid it to heart that he had made man upon the earth, and he pondered it deeply.
- [6:8] And God said, I will blot out man whom I have made from the face of the earth, even man with cattle, and reptiles with flying creatures of the sky, for I am grieved [angry] that I have made them.

In resolving to destroy the disordered and wicked world brought into existence by human sin, God chooses to save a remnant of men and animals as the basis for a "new world" (Gen. 6:5-22). Noah, a righteous descendant of Seth (5:28-32), "finds favor in the eyes of the Lord" (6:8) and is instructed to build a great ark in order to save himself, his family and a large number of birds and beasts from the coming destruction (6:9-22). The biblical description of the great flood appears in Genesis 7-8. The flood raged for 150 days, covering the entire planet to a depth of five miles and leaving only Noah and those with him in the ark alive.

God's decision to save a remnant from destruction – Noe [Noah] and his family (and animals)

- [6:9] But Noe found grace before the Lord God.
- [6:10] And these are the generations of Noe. Noe was a just man; being perfect in his generation, Noe was well-pleasing to God.
- [6:11] And Noe begot three sons, Sem, Cham, Japheth.

The command to build the ark

- [6:12] But the earth was corrupted before God, and the earth was filled with iniquity.
- [6:13] And the Lord God saw the earth, and it was corrupted; because all flesh had corrupted its way upon the earth.
- [6:14] And the Lord God said to Noe, a period of all men [the time of every man] is come before me; because the earth has been filled with iniquity by them, and, behold, I destroy them and the earth.
- [6:15] Make therefore for thyself an ark of square timber; thou shalt make the ark in compartments, and thou shalt pitch it within and without with pitch.
- [6:16] And thus shalt thou make the ark; three hundred cubits the length of the ark, and fifty cubits the breadth, and thirty cubits the height of it.
- [6:17] Thou shalt narrow the ark in making it, and in a cubit above thou shalt finish it, and the door of the ark thou shalt make on the side; with lower, second, and third stories thou shalt make it.
- [6:18] And behold I bring a flood of water upon the earth, to destroy all flesh in which is the breath of life under heaven, and whatsoever things are upon the earth shall die.
- [6:19] And I will establish my covenant with thee, and thou shalt enter into the ark, and thy sons and thy wife, and thy sons' wives with thee.
- [6:20] And of all cattle and of all reptiles and of all wild beasts, even of all flesh, thou shalt bring by pairs of all, into the ark, that thou mayest feed them with thyself: male and female they shall be.
- [6:21] Of all winged birds after their kind, and of all cattle after their kind, and of all reptiles creeping upon the earth after their kind, come in to thee, male and female to be fed with thee.
- [6:22] And thou shalt take to thyself of all kinds of food which ye eat, and thou shalt gather them to thyself, and it shall be for thee and them to eat.
- [6:23] And Noe did all things whatever the Lord God commanded him, so did he.

The command to fill the ark

- [7:1] And the Lord God said to Noe, Enter thou and all thy family [house] into the ark, for thee have I seen righteous before me in this generation.
- [7:2] And of the clean cattle take in to thee sevens, male and female, and of the unclean cattle pairs, male and female.
- [7:3] And of clean flying creatures of the sky sevens, male and female, and of all unclean flying creatures pairs, male and female, to maintain seed on all the earth.
- [7:4] For yet seven days having passed I bring rain upon the earth forty days and forty nights, and I will blot out every offspring which I have made from the face of all the earth.
- [7:5] And Noe did all things whatever the Lord God commanded him.

The flood

- [7:6] And Noe was six hundred years old when the flood of water was upon the earth.
- [7:7] And then went in Noe and his sons and his wife, and his sons' wives with him into the ark, because of the water of the flood.
- [7:8] And of clean flying creatures and of unclean flying creatures, and of clean cattle and of unclean cattle, and of all things that creep upon the earth,
- [7:9] pairs went in to Noe into the ark, male and female, as God commanded Noe.
- [7:10] And it came to pass after the seven days that the water of the flood came upon the earth.
- [7:11] In the six hundredth year of the life of Noe, in the second month, on the twenty-seventh day of the month, on this day all the fountains of the abyss were broken up, and the flood-gates [cataracts] of heaven were opened.
- [7:12] And the rain was upon the earth forty days and forty nights.
- [7:13] On that very day entered Noe, Sem, Cham, Japheth the sons of Noe, and the wife of Noe, and the three wives of his sons with him into the ark.
- [7:14] And all the wild beasts after their kind, and all cattle after their kind, and every reptile moving itself on the earth after its kind, and every flying bird after its kind,
- [7:15] went in to Noe into the ark, pairs, male and female of all flesh in which is the breath of life.

- [7:16] And they that entered went in male and female of all flesh, as God commanded Noe, and the Lord God shut the ark outside of him.
- [7:17] And the flood was upon the earth forty days and forty nights, and the water abounded greatly and bore up the ark, and it was lifted on high from off the earth.
- [7:18] And the water prevailed and abounded exceedingly upon the earth, and the ark was borne upon the water.
- [7:19] And the water prevailed exceedingly upon the earth, and covered all the high mountains which were under heaven.
- [7:20] Fifteen cubits upwards was the water raised, and it covered all the high mountains
- [7:21] And there died all flesh that moved upon the earth, of flying creatures and cattle, and of wild beasts, and every reptile moving upon the earth, and every man.
- [7:22] And all things which have the breath of life, and whatever was on the dry land, died.
- [7:23] And God blotted out every offspring which was upon the face of the earth, both man and beast, and reptiles, and birds of the sky, and they were blotted out from the earth, and Noe was left alone, and those with him in the ark.
- [7:24] And the water was raised over the earth an hundred and fifty days.

The subsiding of the waters

- [8:1] And God remembered Noe, and all the wild beasts, and all the cattle, and all the birds, and all the reptiles that creep, as many as were with him in the ark, and God brought a wind upon the earth and the water stayed.
- [8:2] And the fountains of the deep were closed up, and the flood-gates of heaven, and the rain from heaven was withheld.
- [8:3] And the water subsided, and went off the earth, and after an hundred and fifty days the water was diminished, and the ark rested in the seventh month, on the twenty-seventh day of the month, on the mountains of Ararat.
- [8:4] And the water continued to decrease until the tenth month.
- [8:5] And in the tenth month, on the first day of the month, the heads of the mountains were seen.
- [8:6] And it came to pass after forty days Noe opened the window of the ark which he had made.
- [8:7] And he sent forth a [the] raven [Alex., to see if the water had ceased,] and it went forth and returned not until the water was dried from off the earth.
- [8:8] And he sent a [the] dove after it to see if the water had ceased from off the earth.
- [8:9] And the dove not having found rest for her feet, returned to him into the ark, because the water was on all the face of the earth and he stretched out his hand and took her, and brought her to himself into the ark.
- [8:10] And having waited yet seven other days, he again sent forth the dove from the ark.
- [8:11] And the dove returned to him in the evening and had a leaf of olive, a sprig in her mouth; and Noe knew that the water had ceased from off the earth.
- [8:12] And having waited yet seven other days, he again sent forth the dove, and she did not return to him again any more.

The return to dry land

- [8:13] And it came to pass in the six hundred and first year of the life of Noe, in the first month, on the first day of the month, the water subsided from off the earth and Noe opened the covering of the ark which he had made, and he saw that the water had subsided from the face of the earth.
- [8:14] And in the second month the earth was dried, on the twenty-seventh day of the month.
- [8:15] And the Lord God spoke to Noe, saying,
- [8:16] Come out from the ark, thou and thy wife and thy sons, and thy sons' wives with thee.
- [8:17] And all the wild beasts as many as are with thee and all flesh both of birds and beasts and every reptile moving upon the earth, bring forth with thee: and increase ye and multiply upon the earth.
- [8:18] And Noe came forth, and his wife and his sons, and his sons' wives with him.
- [8:19] And all the wild beasts and all the cattle and every bird, and every reptile creeping upon the earth after their kind, came forth out of the ark.

The theological point of the flood story

Again, we must remind ourselves that the first eleven chapters of Genesis are made up of legendary stories and parables aimed at the revelation of religious truths concerning God, humankind, and nature, not scientific accounts of the history of the human race and the world. What appears in this section of the Bible is the folklore of ancient Israel, organized in such a manner as to serve theological purposes. Many contemporary biblical scholars regard the story of the great flood in Genesis 6-8 as "the Hebrew version of a much older Babylonian myth, which related the adventures . . . of one Utnapishtim, a Babylonian worthy who is warned by the God Ea of an impending deluge, builds an ark and is saved in the same manner as Noah" (Neil). Archeological studies have indicated that this ancient Near Eastern legend is based upon the actual occurrence of a major flood in Mesopotamia about 4000 BC; but the evidence also makes it clear that this inundation was a local one and that it did not cover the entire earth.

There are, however, important differences between the biblical and the Babylonian flood stories. The Babylonian version reflects a pagan religious and mythological perspective: "There are many gods who decree the flood for no apparent reason. The hero is warned by one of them, again for no apparent moral reason." But in the biblical account, "the one God, supreme lord of the situation, decrees the flood because of man's sin. Noah is saved because of his justice" (Jerome Biblical Commentary). The aim of the biblical account is to emphasize God's judgment and condemnation of sin and his steadfast love for the righteous – his refusal to tolerate the unrequited practice of evil and his merciful redemption of that remnant of the human race which strives to conform to the divine will. Thus, in religious and moral content the biblical story of the great flood is entirely different from, and infinitely superior to, the Babylonian version.

The flood and the sacrament of baptism

There is a relationship – in the Bible and in Orthodox theology – between the story of the great flood and the sacrament of baptism. Indeed, the great flood might also be called "the great baptism." In the Bible, water is often employed as a symbol of the world, especially the fallen world, which has been infected by chaos, evil, and death. St. Matthew's account of Jesus walking on the sea is an illustration of this point. Jesus invites Peter to join him on the surface of the water. And at first Peter also walks on the water, "but when he saw the wind, he was afraid, and beginning to sink he cried out, 'Lord, save me.' Jesus immediately reached out his hand and caught him, saying to him, 'O man of little faith, why did you doubt?'" (Mt 14:28-31). Here, Peter's sinking into the sea, and his need to be saved from drowning, is symbolic of man's loss of life as a result of losing faith in God. When Peter takes his eyes off Jesus, the Son of God incarnate, he begins to slip into the chaos and death of the waters; he faces being swallowed up by a fallen world, and he needs to be lifted up again by the Lord himself.

In the sacrament of baptism, a person is immersed in water. This immersion is an entering into the death of Christ; and emergence from the waters of baptism is a participation in the resurrection of Christ from the dead. As we have seen, sinful humanity has been alienated from the life of God. But through the incarnation of God in Christ, the human race is given a second chance to unite itself to God in faith, love, and obedience. In dying for us upon the cross, Christ enters into our death and transforms it into a path to new life. Christ's death destroys death itself, because Christ is Life. Through Christ's immersion in "the waters of chaos, evil, and death," those waters – which may also be taken as a symbol of the entire fallen world – are "filled with the presence of God" (Lazor). The waters of baptism represent not only death but a world which has been transfigured by the incarnate life of God. Through the baptismal rite, we die to sin and rise to eternal life in Christ.

St. Peter makes the relationship between the great flood and the sacrament of baptism explicit. He says that Christ's saving work was foreshadowed "in the days of Noah, during the building of the ark, in which a few, that is, eight persons, were saved through water. Baptism, which corresponds to this, now saves you, not as a removal of dirt from the body but as an appeal to God for a clear conscience, through the resurrection of Jesus Christ" (1 Pt 3:18, 20-22). The great flood is a symbol of God's

eternal judgment of sin. St. Peter depicts Noah as a type of those who look to God in faith and are thus mercifully redeemed from the destruction which sin brings. The ark of Noah is a type of Christ, in whom the faithful remnant is saved through water.

Genesis 8:20-9:19 -The Rainbow [Noahic] Covenant

(1) Noe's altar

- [8:20] And Noe built an altar to the Lord, and took of all clean beasts, and of all clean birds, and offered a whole burnt-offering upon the altar.
- [8:21] And the Lord God smelled a smell of sweetness, and the Lord God having considered, said, I will not any more curse the earth, because of the works of men, because the imagination of man is intently bent upon evil things from his youth, I will not therefore any more smite all living flesh as I have done.
- [8:22] All the days of the earth, seed and harvest, cold and heat, summer and spring, shall not cease by day or night.

(2) Meat but no blood

- [9:1] And God blessed Noe and his sons, and said to them, Increase and multiply, and fill the earth and have dominion over it.
- [9:2] And the dread and the fear of you shall be upon all the wild beasts of the earth, on all the birds of the sky, and on all things moving upon the earth, and upon all the fishes of the sea, I have placed them under your power [hands].
- [9:3] And every reptile which is living shall be to you for meat, I have given all things to you as the green herbs [herbs of grass].
- [9:4] But flesh with blood of life ye shall not eat.
- [9:5] For your blood of your lives will I require at the hand of all wild beasts, and I will require the life of man at the hand of his brother man.
- [9:6] He that sheds man's blood instead of that blood shall his own be shed, for in the image of God I made man.
- [9:7] But do ye increase and multiply, and fill the earth, and have dominion over it.

(3) The covenant sealed with a sign

- [9:8] And God spoke to Noe and to his sons with him, saying,
- [9:9] And behold I establish my covenant with you, and with your seed after you,
- [9:10] and with every living creature [soul] with you, of birds and of beasts, and with all the wild beasts of the earth, as many as are with you, of all that come out of the ark.
- [9:11] And I will establish my covenant with you and all flesh shall not any more die by the water of the flood, and there shall no more be a flood of water to destroy all the earth
- [9:12] And the Lord God said to Noe, This is the sign of the covenant which I set between me and you, and between every living creature which is with you for perpetual generations.
- [9:13] I set my bow in the cloud, and it shall be for a sign of covenant between me and the earth.
- [9:14] And it shall be when I gather clouds upon the earth, that my bow shall be seen in the cloud.
- [9:15] And I will remember my covenant, which is between me and you, and between every living soul in all flesh, and there shall no longer be water for a deluge, so as to blot out all flesh.
- [9:16] And my bow shall be in the cloud, and I will look to remember the everlasting covenant between me and the earth, and between every living soul in all flesh which is upon the earth.
- [9:17] And God said to Noe, This is the sign of the covenant, which I have made between me and all flesh, which is upon the earth.

[9:18] Now the sons of Noe which came out of the ark, were Sem, Cham, Japheth. And Cham was father of Chanaan [Canaan].

[9:19] These three are the sons of Noe; of these were men scattered over all the earth.

The parable of the great flood is followed by the story of God's covenant with Noah (Gen. 9:1-17). According to the Bible, God has entered into a number of "covenants" (or agreements) with human individuals, nations, and the human race in general. These covenants are "sovereign pronouncements" which establish "relationships of responsibility" between God and humans. In his covenants, God sets down the conditions of human existence and makes promises concerning the future. Some of these promises will be fulfilled unconditionally, while the fulfillment of others depends upon man's faithful response to the commandments of God. Each covenant, moreover, is accompanied by a sign or seal given by God as evidence that an agreement has been made.

Three such covenants are given explicit consideration in the Pentateuch [Books of Moses]:

The covenant with Noah (Gen. 9:1-17) is unilateral in that it is not conditioned upon man's faithful response to God; it is extended to all creation, "and its sign is a natural phenomenon" – the rainbow.

The covenant with Abraham (Gen. 12:1-3; 13:14-17; 15:1-7, 18-21; and 17:18) "presupposes his personal commitment to God, is extended only to his descendants, and its sign is circumcision."

The covenant with Israel (Ex 19-24) "requires continuing loyalty . . . is extended to the nation, and its sign is the Sabbath observance" (see Ex 31:16-17).

The Noahic covenant is based upon God's presupposition of the moral and spiritual disorder caused by sin, for "the imagination of man's heart is evil from his youth" (Gen. 8:21). The Lord's decree is that humanity's dominion over nature will be "exercised, not in peace, but through fear" (Jerome Biblical Commentary).

The killing and eating of animals – which had been forbidden in God's original dispensation - is now acknowledged as a central feature of human culture. Humanity is, however, prohibited from devouring the blood of animals; for, in biblical thought, blood is considered the essence of life, and life ultimately belongs not to humanity but to God.

The covenant also prohibits the murder of human beings and establishes the death penalty as a divinely ordained institution. "Whoever sheds man's blood, By man his blood shall be shed; for in the image of God He made man " (Gen. 9:6, NKJV). The hostile relationships between humans and animals and between human and human, which are alluded to in these texts, are symbolic of the corruption of the world wrought by human sinfulness.

The scope of God's covenant with Noah is universal – that is, it extends beyond Noah to his descendants and indeed to all animal life (Gen. 9:8-10). The promise of this covenant is "that never again shall all flesh be cut off by the waters of a flood, and never again shall there be a flood to destroy the earth" (9:11). This promise does not mean that God will not continue to judge, condemn, and punish sin; but it does mean that God's creation will not be finally destroyed by the powers of evil. God's redemptive purpose will prevail. As already noted, the sign of the Noahic covenant is the rainbow (9:11-17), a sign of God's promise of redemption to Noah and to all the world.

Genesis 9-11:9 – The Continuing Challenge of Evil

(1) The sin of Cham (Ham) (Gen. 9:20-27)

- [9:20] And Noe began to be a husbandman, and he planted a vineyard.
[9:21] And he drank of the wine, and was drunk, and was naked in his house.
[9:22] And Cham the father of Chanaan saw the nakedness of his father, and he went out and told his two brothers without.
[9:23] And Sem and Japheth having taken a garment, put it on both their backs and went backwards, and covered the nakedness of their father; and their face was backward and they saw not the nakedness of their father.
[9:24] And Noe recovered from the wine, and knew all that his younger son had done to him.
[9:25] And he said, Cursed be the servant Chanaan, a slave shall he be to his brethren.
[9:26] And he said, Blessed be the Lord God of Sem, and Chanaan shall be his bond-servant.
[9:27] May God make room for Japheth, and let him dwell in the habitations of Sem, and let Chanaan be his servant.

There are two major puzzles contained in this text: What, exactly, was the nature of Ham's offense? And why does Noah pronounce his curse on Canaan, Ham's son (10:6), rather than upon Ham himself?

The essence of Ham's sin is expressed in the phrase, "saw the nakedness of his father," a phrase which must be understood in the light of chapter 18 of the book of Leviticus. In that text, God proclaims that it is an abomination for a man to "uncover the nakedness" of his father, his mother, his sister, his children, his grandchildren, his aunts and uncles, his sisters-in-law, and his daughters-in-law (Lv 18:6-16). What is condemned here is any act of incest. It is quite clear that the expression "uncover the nakedness" refers to various forms of sexual intercourse. It should also be noted that homosexuality is condemned in Leviticus 18:22 and 20:13 and in Romans 1:26-27. What Ham did, then, was to engage in some form of incestuous and homosexual intercourse with his father. (It is, by the way, interesting that the Bible contains no suggestion that Noah's drunkenness was in any way reprehensible.)

Noah's curse upon Canaan is quite consistent with the ancient Near Eastern view that a man's proudest hope lies in the future prosperity of his descendants (his "seed"). Thus, the curse upon Canaan is a curse upon Ham. The Bible tells us that the sexual atrocities that later became common among the Canaanite tribes of ancient Palestine resulted from the sin of Ham and led to the eventual conquest of the Canaanites by the people of Israel. The Israelites were, as we shall see, descendants of Shem, who is blessed and named by Noah as the conqueror by whom Canaan will be enslaved. This scandalous profile of sin and congenital sexual disease is an extraordinarily dramatic and apt example of the depth of human sinfulness.

The death of Noe

- [9:28] And Noe lived after the flood three hundred and fifty years.
[9:29] And all the days of Noe were nine hundred and fifty years, and he died.

(2) The fragmentation of the human race - descendants of the sons of Noe (Gen. 10)

The descendants of Noah are divided into three major groups: the sons of Japheth (10:1-5), the sons of Ham (10:6-20) and the sons of Shem (10:21-32). And these three groups are further subdivided into a multitude of peoples, cultures and nations. These genealogies may, of course, constitute a primitive attempt to account for the geographical and ethnological distribution of the world's human population. But the theological significance of this rather undramatic section of Genesis is its emphasis upon the division, separation, and fragmentation of the human race, which is one of the fundamental conditions of "man's inhumanity to man." The forces of cultural chauvinism, ethnocentrism, and nationalism are among the most obvious signs of humanity's loss of its unity under God. This loss of original unity is surely one of the major symptoms of human sinfulness.

[10:1] Now these are the generations of the sons of Noe, Sem, Cham, Japheth; and sons were born to them after the flood.

The Japhites

[10:2] The sons of Japheth, Gomer, and Magog, and Madoi, and Javan, and Elisa, and Thobel, and Mosoch, and Thiras.

[10:3] And the sons of Gomer, Aschanaz, and Riphath, and Thorgama.

[10:4] And the sons of Javan, Elisa, and Tharseis, Cetians, Rhodians.

[10:5] From these were the islands of the Gentiles divided in their land, each according to his tongue, in their tribes and in their nations.

The Hamites

[10:6] And the sons of Cham, Chus, and Mesrain, Phud, and Chanaan.

[10:7] And the sons of Chus, Saba, and Evila, and Sabatha, and Rhegma, and Sabathaca. And the sons of Rhegma, Saba, and Dadan.

[10:8] And Chus begot Nebrod: he began to be a giant upon the earth.

[10:9] He was a giant hunter before the Lord God; therefore they say, As Nebrod the giant hunter before the Lord.

[10:10] And the beginning of his kingdom was Babylon, and Orech, and Archad, and Chalanne, in the land of Senaar.

[10:11] Out of that land came Assur, and built Ninevi, and the city Rhooboth, and Chalach,

[10:12] and Dase between Ninevi and Chalach: this is the great city.

[10:13] And Mesrain begot the Ludiim and the Nephthalim, and the Enemetiim, and the Labiim,

[10:14] and the Patrosioniim and the Chasmoniim (whence came forth Phylistiim) and the Gaphthoriim.

[10:15] And Chanaan begot Sidon his first-born and the Chettite,

[10:16] and the Jebusite, and the Amorite, and the Girgashite,

[10:17] and the Evite, and the Arukite, and the Asennite,

[10:18] and the Aradian, and the Samarean, and the Amathite; and after this the tribes of the Chananites were dispersed.

[10:19] And the boundaries of the Chananites were from Sidon till one comes to Gerara and Gaza, till one comes to Sodom and Gomorrha, Adama and Seboim, as far as Dasa.

[10:20] These were the sons of Cham in their tribes according to their tongues, in their countries, and in their nations.

The Semites

[10:21] And to Sem himself also were children born, the father of all the sons of Heber, the brother of Japheth the elder.

[10:22] Sons of Sem, Elam, and Assur, and Arphaxad, and Lud, and Aram, and Cainan.

[10:23] And sons of Aram, Uz, and Ul, and Gater, and Mosoch.

- [10:24] And Arphaxad begot Cainan and Cainan begot Sala. And Sala begot Heber.
 [10:25] And to Heber were born two sons, the name of the one, Phaleg, because in his days the earth was divided, and the name of his brother Jektan.
 [10:26] And Jektan begot Elmodad, and Saleth, and Sarmoth, and Jarach,
 [10:27] and Odorrha, and Aibel, and Decla,
 [10:28] and Eval, and Abimael, and Saba,
 [10:29] and Uphir, and Evila, and Jobab, all these were the sons of Jektan.
 [10:30] And their dwelling was from Masse, till one comes to Saphera, a mountain of the east.
 [10:31] These were the sons of Sem in their tribes, according to their tongues, in their countries, and in their nations.
 [10:32] These are the tribes of the sons of Noe, according to their generations, according to their nations: of them were [the islands of the] Gentiles scattered over the earth after the flood.

(3) The Tower of Babel (Gen. 11:1-9)

- [11:1] And all the earth was one lip, and there was one language to all.
 [11:2] And it came to pass as they moved from the east, they found a plain in the land of Senaar, and they dwelt there.
 [11:3] And a man said to his neighbour, Come, let us make bricks and bake them with fire. And the brick was to them for stone, and their mortar was bitumen.
 [11:4] And they said, Come, let us build to ourselves a city and tower, whose top shall be to heaven, and let us make to ourselves a name, before we are scattered abroad upon the face of all the earth.
 [11:5] And the Lord came down to see the city and the tower, which the sons of men built.
 [11:6] And the Lord said, Behold, There is one race, and one lip of all, and they have begun to do this and now nothing shall fail from them of all that they may have undertaken to do.
 [11:7] Come, and having gone down let us there confound their tongue, that they may not understand each the voice of his neighbour.
 [11:8] And the Lord scattered them thence over the face of all the earth, and they left off building the city and the tower.
 [11:9] On this account its name was called Confusion, because there the Lord confounded the languages of all the earth, and thence the Lord scattered them upon the face of all the earth.

The story of the Tower of Babel in Genesis 11:1-9 is a final illustration of the human corruption that prevails in the world after the flood. This legendary tale is based upon a well-known fact: human beings speak various languages and, even among those who share the same tongue, effective and meaningful communication is always difficult and sometimes impossible. Human beings, therefore, suffer from a "confusion of tongues" and often cannot understand one another. This "crisis of communication," the Bible tells us, is a sign of man's fallenness, a "symbol of mankind's effort to proclaim their independence from God" (Miller). It is a further expression of man's sinful rebelliousness against God and of God's consequent judgment of man and his world.

Genesis 11:10-32 – Another New Beginning: From Sem to Abraham

The descent of the Semites from Sem to Abraham – the origins of Israel (the Chosen People)

- [11:10] And these are the generations of Sem: and Sem was a hundred years old when he begot Arphaxad, the second year after the flood.
 [11:11] And Sem lived, after he had begotten Arphaxad, five hundred years, and begot sons and daughters, and died.
 [11:12] And Arphaxad lived a hundred and thirty-five years, and begot Cainan.
 [11:13] And Arphaxad lived after he had begotten Cainan, four hundred [Alex. 430] years, and begot sons and daughters, and died. And Cainan lived a hundred and thirty years and begot Sala; and

- Canaan lived after he had begotten Sala, three hundred and thirty years, and begot sons and daughters, and died.
- [11:14] And Sala lived an hundred and thirty years, and begot Heber.
- [11:15] And Sala lived after he had begotten Heber, three hundred and thirty years, and begot sons and daughters, and died.
- [11:16] And Heber lived an hundred and thirty-four years, and begot Phaleg.
- [11:17] And Heber lived after he had begotten Phaleg two hundred and seventy [Alex. 370] years, and begot sons and daughters, and died.
- [11:18] And Phaleg lived an hundred and thirty years, and begot Ragau.
- [11:19] And Phaleg lived after he had begotten Ragau, two hundred and nine years, and begot sons and daughters, and died.
- [11:20] And Ragau lived an hundred thirty and two years, and begot Seruch.
- [11:21] And Ragau lived after he had begotten Seruch, two hundred and seven years, and begot sons and daughters, and died.
- [11:22] And Seruch lived hundred and thirty years, and begot Nachor.
- [11:23] And Seruch lived after he had begotten Nachor, two hundred years, and begot sons and daughters, and died.
- [11:24] And Nachor lived a hundred and seventy-nine [Alex. 79] years, and begot Tharrha.
- [11:25] And Nachor lived after he had begotten Tharrha, an hundred and twenty-five [Alex. 129] years, and begot sons and daughters, and he died.
- [11:26] And Pharrha lived seventy years, and begot Abram, and Nachor, and Arrhan.

The genealogy of Abraham

- [11:27] And these are the generations of Tharrha. Tharrha begot Abram and Nahor, and Arrhan; and Arrhan begot Lot.
- [11:28] And Arrhan died in the presence of Tharrha his father, in the land in which he was born, in the country of the Chaldees.
- [11:29] And Abram and Nachor took to themselves wives, the name of the wife of Abram was Sara and the name of the wife of Nachor, Malcha, daughter of Arrhan, and he was the father of Malcha, the father of Jescha.
- [11:30] And Sara was barren, and did not bear children.
- [11:31] And Tharrha took Abram his son, and Lot the son of Arrhan, the son of his son, and Sara his daughter-in-law, the wife of Abram his son, and led them forth out of the land of the Chaldees, to go into the land of Chanaan, and they came as far as Charrhan, and he dwelt there.
- [11:32] And all the days of Tharrha in the land of Charrhan were two hundred and five years, and Tharrha died in Charrhan.

The genealogy which traces the descent of the Semites from Shem to Abraham (Gen. 11:10-32) is the final sign of God's redemptive work presented in Genesis 1-11. In Abraham, God chooses a new remnant. The descendants of Abraham will be the people of Israel, the chosen people. And it is from the chosen people that the Redeemer promised in Genesis 3:15 will come. The "seed of the woman" derives from the long line of Adam, Seth, Noah, Shem, Abraham, Isaac, Jacob, Judah, and David. Jesus Christ, the "son of David," born of a virgin, will be the greatest in the line of "the sons of God" (see Mt 1:1-18 and Lk 3:23-38). This genealogical progression is carried forward significantly in the eleventh chapter of Genesis. In the coming of Abraham there is new hope, for the movement of God's redemptive will is accelerated in the direction of the "new and everlasting covenant" of Jesus Christ.

The great themes of Genesis 1-11: (1) God's creation of humanity and the cosmos; (2) the sinfulness of human race and its consequent alienation from God; (3) God's eternal judgment, condemnation, and punishment of sin; and (4) God's redemptive purpose for man and the world.

The overall message of Genesis 1-11: Humanity's failure to love and obey God, their desire to live "on their own" without the presence of God, is the source of all the anxiety, meaninglessness, and horror of human existence. The centrality of God in biblical thought reminds us that God is the foundation and the fountain of life and that the love of God is the key to human fulfillment, for only in God can we find our true selves and our salvation.