

# **GENESIS 1-11**

**by Robert C. Walton**



# GENESIS 1-11, LESSON I

## Background and Context

Genesis, as the book of beginnings, sets the context, not only for the Pentateuch, but also for the entire Bible. Genesis 1-11 provides the introduction to that foundation, and as such is vitally important. If we are to understand and interpret Genesis 1-11 rightly, however, we must also understand the context in which it was written.

### AUTHORSHIP

Though the book of Genesis includes no information about its author, both Jewish and Christian tradition are unanimous in ascribing it to Moses. The Pentateuch or Torah is treated as a unit under Mosaic authorship, not only in tradition, but also in the New Testament (John 1:17; 5:46; 7:19, 23 - the last is particularly noteworthy because of its reference to circumcision, which was instituted in the time of Abraham and recorded in the book of Genesis). The five books are so obviously a unity that those who deny Mosaic authorship have been forced to postulate an anonymous editor or redactor who brought unity to diverse source materials. It should be noted, however, that the initial questioning of Mosaic authorship stemmed from an environment of unbelief in the nineteenth century (e.g. Wellhausen's Documentary Hypothesis), has little in the text to motivate it aside from a few obvious editorial contributions like the description of Moses' death at the end of Deuteronomy, and has absolutely no manuscript evidence whatsoever to support it.

### OVERALL PURPOSE

The fundamental purpose of the book of Genesis is to introduce the Pentateuch, and more broadly the Old Testament and the whole Bible. Thus it establishes the basic themes that will serve as the foundation for all that follows - God, man, sin, and the covenant by which God addresses the problem of sin created by man's rebellion in the Garden of Eden. The prologue of the book of Genesis, which is the subject of our study in this course, tells us who God is, who man is, how things originally were, how they got to be the way they are now, and what God is doing about it. The early chapters of Genesis not only show man's repeated failures and God's judgments and ongoing mercies, but also demonstrate the continuity between the beginning of human history and the covenant with Abraham, in the process explaining the narrowing of the focus of God's work from Adam to Seth to Noah to Abraham.

### SELECTIVITY

The history found in Genesis 1-11 is therefore highly selective. In a narrative that covers thousands of years, only two significant incidents are recorded once we get beyond the range of Adam and his immediate family - the Flood and the Tower of Babel. Otherwise, we have lists establishing chronological continuity and geographical expansion containing a few brief comments about notable figures such as Lamech and Nimrod. We know, of course, that many significant events in human history occurred between the time of Adam and the time of Noah - domestication

of animals, metalworking - about which the Bible says virtually nothing. Furthermore, between the time of Noah and that of Abraham, great civilizations arose in Mesopotamia and Egypt and significant steps were made in the development of human society - government, law, writing (cuneiform initially; alphabetic systems originated only a short time before the days of Moses) - about which the Bible says nothing. We must then ask ourselves how the incidents that are recorded contribute to the great themes of the Bible: Who is God? Who is man? What is the nature of the world as formed by God? How did the world get to be the way it is now? How is God carrying out His plan to restore the broken relationship between man and Himself? By looking at these questions we will come to understand much more easily the reasons behind the narratives presented in this foundational portion of Scripture.

## ANCIENT NEAR EASTERN COSMOLOGIES

When seeking to interpret Scripture rightly, we must always ask what the words before us would have meant to the author and to the original readers. If we fail to do so, we will find it altogether too easy to impose on the Bible our own worldview, our own modes of thought, and our own questions about the nature of things. For that reason, we must understand something of the way in which the ancients viewed the world around them if we are to understand what the early chapters of Genesis are and are not saying.

The inhabitants of the ancient Near East understood the cosmos to consist of three parts - the heavens, the earth, and the underworld. The earth was a disk surrounded by mountains, which in turn held up the heavens. The heavens touched the earth at its borders, and therefore were not all that far away. The sources of light - the sun, moon, and stars - inhabited the heavens and moved around the circle that the heavens formed, passing beneath the earth each night only to reappear the next morning. The underworld was a dark and watery place, and the heavens consisted of several layers, one of which was made of water also. Such cosmologies are recorded in the writings of the Mesopotamian civilization (*Atrahasis Epic*), the Old Babylonian Empire (*Enuma Elish*), and the writings of the Egyptians in the late third and early second millennia BC.

In these ancient mythologies, the parts of the cosmos are associated with various gods in the polytheistic systems of the various civilizations. Furthermore, earth is created as a result of conflicts among the gods, in particular a conflict between ancient deities representing primitive chaos and newer gods warring to bring order out of that chaos. Man appears only as an afterthought, created by the gods when they get tired of doing all the work themselves to produce the things they need to survive. Man thus comes into being as a servant of the gods, who require beings to meet their needs. Note how the biblical creation account addresses each aspect of this popular understanding of the cosmos, correcting each by presenting a single omnipotent God who created all things, who imposed order on a primitive chaos of His own making, who designed the cosmos to be inhabited by man and designed man for the cosmos, and who seeks a relationship with man rather than needing him to be His servant.

## GENESIS 1-11 AND SCIENTIFIC ISSUES

Thus it is important for us to remember that Genesis was not written to answer the questions that we tend to bring to the book. Instead, it was written to answer the questions of the ancients. Those answers, which are so often lost in the conflicts over science and the Bible, are the most important ideas in the section of Scripture before us; we should note that, if those ideas were understood and accepted, the questions about science and the Bible would not be of as great significance. While issues like the length of the days of Creation, the age of the earth, the age of man, and the universality of the Flood are worth exploring, we must realize that the Bible was not written to answer such questions, but that any answers that undermine the fundamental truths that Genesis was written to address - that God is the maker and controller of all things, that man is in rebellion against Him and consequently the cosmos and all that is in it are fundamentally abnormal, and that God is actively working to restore the harmony that was lost (note that Darwinian evolution, for example, undermines all of these ideas) must be rejected apart from any scientific evidence that may be presented.

Another important aspect of the worldview of the ancients is that they had little interest in how things came to be. They were much more interested in the matters of form and function. The literature of the period spends little time describing the mechanisms by which things came into existence. Instead, it spends a great deal of time talking about how what is formless is given shape, and how its functions are assigned and supervised. We will revisit this concept next week when we talk about the days of Creation.

## HISTORY AND MYTH

In the same way that thinkers in the pre-modern era did not distinguish between astronomy and astrology or between chemistry and alchemy (Johann Kepler was a practicing astrologer and Isaac Newton was very interested in alchemy), people prior to the modern era made no distinction between history and myth. To the ancients, a cosmos functioning apart from the gods would have been unthinkable. Everything therefore was to be explained in terms of the activity of the gods. We look at such things today and label them myths because we do not believe in the existence of the gods used by the ancients to explain their world. Our gods have been reduced to matter, time, and chance, which have become the tools we use to explain the cosmos around us. Sometimes we become so completely absorbed in our own worldview that we look at such ancient writings and think that the people who lived in millennia past were deliberately fabricating fascinating stories in which they did not really believe. Instead, the gods were as real to them as the atom is to us. When we distinguish between history and myth, we are immediately introducing our own worldview into the literature of the ancient world and imposing on it an understanding that would have been foreign to the cultures that produced it. The same is true with the writers and original readers of the Bible. They were not myth-makers, weaving fanciful tales to fill the gaps that science had not yet filled. They believed that what they wrote was the truth about the cosmos, and it is an explanation that coheres with reality far better than the impoverished materialism of the modern era.



## GENESIS 1-11, LESSON II

### The Days of Creation (Genesis 1)

Interpretations of Genesis 1 in recent years have tended to focus on the scientific questions raised though advances in astronomy, physics, and biology. As noted last week, our interest in these questions causes us to ask questions of the text that the text was never intended to answer. Today, we will survey some of the approaches taken in the last few centuries and attempt to connect them to the purpose of the text as delivered to the original recipients. The result should be a clearer idea of what we should and should not be expecting Genesis 1 to tell us.

#### CHRONOLOGICAL INTERPRETATIONS

##### A. THE TWENTY-FOUR HOUR DAY THEORY

This one very simply views the days of Genesis 1 as normal 24-hour periods, and is clearly the most straightforward approach to the passage. It is supported not only by the repeated assertions of “evening and morning,” but also by the reference to the creative week in Exodus 20:11. Interestingly enough, this interpretation is not only supported by many evangelicals, but also by a significant number of liberal scholars, who unfortunately go on to argue that the passage is therefore simply wrong. Obviously, the Twenty-four Hour Day Theory completely contradicts all current scientific evidence concerning the age of the earth and requires massive use of the idea of created age. It also generates problems when it is compared to the extended picture of the sixth day given in Genesis 2. Those who believe that God created the universe in six literal days must also believe that He created it in a mature state. We will discuss the viability of this interpretation at the end of today’s class.

##### B. THE GAP THEORY

The Gap Theory also asserts a literal creation week, but inserts between the first two verses of Genesis 1 an indeterminately large period of time. Gap Theorists believe that verse 2 should be translated to say that “the earth became formless and empty,” implying a previous creation that God destroyed. Usually this destruction is connected by Gap Theorists with the fall from heaven of Satan. Scriptural support is derived from the possibility of translating the verb in question as *became* (possible, yes, but far less likely than the simple *was*) and passages such as Isaiah 45:18 and Jeremiah 4:23. To read into the prophetic passages statements about the early history of the earth is to stretch them far beyond what their contexts permit. In short, the Gap Theory, while certainly possible, allows for no scriptural support whatever. On the other hand, no positive scriptural evidence may be marshaled against it. It is pure speculation - an attempt to be biblical and leave room for the findings of modern science, so that the geological ages, dinosaurs, and primitive hominids can be placed nicely within the gap before the alleged re-creation.

### C. THE DAY-AGE THEORY

The basic idea behind the Day-Age Theory is the notion that the creative days of Genesis 1 are long periods of time rather than 24-hour days. In support of such an interpretation, scholars note that the Hebrew word for *day* has much the same semantic range as the English word, and is susceptible to such a meaning (e.g., “the day of the Lord”). Opponents point out that the numbering of days in Scripture always refers to 24-hour periods. Proponents also argue that the biblical evidence for the sixth and seventh days points to periods longer than 24 hours (the description of the activity of the sixth day in Genesis 2 seems difficult to squeeze into such a short period of time, while the seventh day continues to the present, since believers are invited in Hebrews 4 to enter into God’s rest).

Obviously, this approach leaves room, not only for astronomical and geological evidence, but also for the evolutionary process. Most theistic evolutionists follow some form of this argument. A serious problem with the argument arises, however, when one notes that the existence of plants (third day) for long ages prior to the creation of animals (fifth and sixth days) is impossible because of the interdependence that exists between the plant and animal kingdoms. While the 24-hour day approach is often criticized for having light and evenings and mornings before the creation of the sun, it must be noted that the problem is even more severe for the day-age theorist. Most respond to this by arguing that the fourth day represents the time at which the sun became visible from the earth because of atmospheric changes caused by plant photosynthesis.

### D. THE PROGRESSIVE CREATION THEORY

The theory of Progressive Creation is similar in most respects to the older Day-Age Theory, except that it sees the days of Genesis 1 as specific creative acts of God separated by long periods of time. This is somewhat less evolutionary in character than the Day-Age Theory, but susceptible to the same criticisms. Some who take this approach argue that, while the creative days are separated by many eons, the ages following those creative days overlap. While this does not completely solve the interdependence problem mentioned above, it does make things flow a bit more smoothly. Notice, too, that such an approach coheres more easily with the modern evolutionary theory of *punctuated equilibrium*, in which long periods of stasis are interrupted with brief, intense periods of rapid change.

## LITERARY INTERPRETATIONS

### A. THE VISION THEORY

This theory completely denies that any scientific conclusions may be drawn from the account of Creation in Genesis 1. It is argued instead that the account recorded here is the result of six nights of visions given to a chosen man in which God revealed the scope of his creative activity. The six days are not thus a chronology of how God created the world, but instead a chronology of how He revealed His handiwork to His chosen servant. When this approach is taken, it clearly leaves people



free to adopt any scientific explanation currently in favor without fear of facing contradiction from Scripture.

## B. THE FRAMEWORK THEORY

The framework theory also denies that Genesis 1 makes any statements that can be taken as scientific in nature. It views the passage as poetic, and points out that the events of the days exhibit a curious parallelism, as follows:

DAY 1 - light	DAY 4 - light bearers
DAY 2 - sea and sky	DAY 5 - fish and birds
DAY 3 - dry land	DAY 6 - animals and man

The parallels are interesting, though incomplete - plants are left out, for instance - and the Framework Theory does emphasize the form and function approach we talked about last week. On the other hand, the chapter completely lacks all characteristics of Hebrew poetry. When the Bible does give a poetic account of Creation (e.g., Psalm 104), it is very different from Genesis 1.

## C. THE LITURGICAL THEORY

Very similar to the Framework Theory, this approach views Genesis 1 as a worship text that somehow found its way into the Bible out of its original context. Again, the implication would be that the passage is useless for scientific purposes. It also undermines the inspiration of the text.

## D. THE TEMPLE THEORY

This approach suggests that Genesis 1 is a description of the creative labors of God that was deliberately modeled on man's work week. God thus completes the work of building a temple He wishes to inhabit in a work week of six days, then on the seventh day enters and inhabits that temple. Though Isaiah 66:1-2 pictures heaven as God's throne and the earth as His footstool, several problems exist with this approach. The first is that Genesis 1 pictures the Creation as made for man rather than for God. After all, God needs no material dwelling place. Furthermore, the temple theory makes the seventh day the climax of the creative week. Though it is true that God's rest is that toward which all things move (Hebrews 4), the extended description of the sixth day in Genesis 2 would seem to indicate that the climax of God's work is the creation of man, for whose habitation the entire universe was assembled.

## THE CONCEPT OF CREATED AGE

Anyone who takes the Genesis account of Creation at all seriously must to some extent accept the notion of created age, simply because Adam and Eve were created by God as adults rather than infants (the only exception to this is those Progressive Creationists who would argue that the creation of Adam involved God granting a soul to some already-existing hominid, thus making him

“man” in the full sense of the word). The objection to created age therefore cannot be that the Bible does not support the idea. The issue is one of degree.

Secondly, our concept of the power of God enters into the discussion. There can be no question that God has the power to create a mature universe. Since the Bible pictures man as the pinnacle of Creation, should we be surprised if God created a world that was fully prepared for human habitation, complete not only with natural resources but also with the light from the stars already reaching the earth?

The obvious criticism that is often raised here is that the concept of created age makes God a deceiver. This is true only if we assume that God intended the universe to be studied and interpreted in purely naturalistic terms. When the psalmist said that the heavens declare the glory of God, he did not mean that the eye of the natural man would find God in the study of the stars. In fact, Romans 1 indicates clearly that sinful man perverts whatever evidence of God’s power is to be found in nature. Man’s efforts to understand the universe apart from God are sinful in themselves. How can we expect them to yield truth? Furthermore, the truth is discernible only to the eyes of faith. We face the same problem when dealing with evidence for the existence of God or the inspiration of Scripture.

## ASKING THE RIGHT QUESTIONS

The original readers of Genesis knew nothing of science as we understand it. To them, the primary cause of all that happened was the activity of the gods - or, in the case of monotheistic Israel, the activity of the One True God. Thus, they would have looked at this introductory section and seen several basic truths:

- The One True God is the creator of all things. He did not have to do battle with other gods, for there are none; nor did He have to overcome primeval chaos, since He created chaos and gave it form and function.
- The basic functions of the universe were designed by God - time, weather, seasons, the agricultural cycle - and were designed for man’s benefit. Note that Genesis 1 is much more concerned with the functions of the created universe than it is with how the supporting structures came into being. While we care how something came into existence, the ancients cared much more about how it works. Note, too, that this form/function relationship explains the connections observed by advocates of the Framework Theory.
- Man is the pinnacle of God’s Creation, not merely an afterthought. The entire purpose of the Creation was to make a place for man to inhabit. Thus it should not surprise us that the descriptions of the various aspects of Creation are man-centered in terms of the functions that are described. One aspect of the current thinking among advocates of Intelligent Design, the Anthropropic Principle, clearly recognizes this aspect of the created order.

Does this then mean that we can expect Genesis 1 to shed no light on the theory of evolution, for example? Not at all. Note that evolutionary theory as it is commonly held contradicts all three ideas expressed above. The central problem with Darwinism is not the conclusions that it reaches, but the assumptions that it makes about the nature of reality. Atheistic naturalism is as clearly contradicted by Genesis 1 as it was read in the second millennium BC as it is in the eyes of modern evangelicals. The same may be said of theistic evolution, which is in reality deistic in character, since it sees God as acting at the beginning and letting things take their course. Punctuated equilibrium is no better, since it isolates God's activity to the brief periods of change scattered among long periods of unaided development.

As far as the distinction between chronological and literary readings of the text, in my opinion the chronological indicators are simply too strong to be ignored. Questions of time and sequence, though not the focus of the passage, are nonetheless present and cannot easily be brushed aside. We must recognize, however, that the questions that are important to the author must be the ones that are important to us as well. *That* God created is more important than *how* God created, though we may not espouse an understanding that contradicts the revelation He has given us. The desire to accommodate naturalistic science undermines the centrality of God in the Genesis narrative.



## GENESIS 1-11, LESSON III

### The Sixth Day Detailed (Genesis 2)

Having spoken in general terms of the creation of all things by God, Moses now turns his attention to the focal point of God's Creation - mankind - by giving additional detail to flesh out the brief description of the sixth day given in chapter one.

#### ONE ACCOUNT OR TWO?

Critics in the modern era have dismissed the authenticity of the Creation account in Genesis by arguing that the early chapters represent a rather sloppy attempt to bring together two divergent traditions concerning the creation of the world. In the nineteenth century, such ideas originated in Wellhausen's observation that God is referred to as *Elohim* in Genesis 1 and as *Yahweh* in Genesis 2. Other commentators have focused on so-called contradictions in the two chapters, such as the apparent creation of plants after the creation of man in chapter 2.

Such criticisms are groundless on a number of levels. First of all, God is referred to as *Yahweh Elohim* in chapter 2. Rather than the name of a different deity from an alternative tradition, what we have here is the fact that the God of all Creation is identified with the covenant God of Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob - the same covenant God who called Moses to lead the Israelites out of Egypt and write these books. Furthermore, the apparent contradictions are easily resolved when the purpose of the second chapter is taken into account, as we will see below.

#### THE SABBATH (2:1-3)

Commentators differ as to the appropriate interpretation of the seventh day. Is it to be seen as the climax of the creative week, indicating the purpose for which all was accomplished, or is it an indication that the work of Creation is done - a sort of cosmic denouement? Those who interpret the Creation account as the construction of a cosmic temple and the installation of its functionaries advocate the former - God's rest involves Him settling in and inhabiting the temple He has built for Himself. Since the focus of the Creation account is on man and his place in the cosmos, however, I would argue for the second explanation - an indication that God perfectly completed His work of preparing a place for man to inhabit. The use of the passage as a model in Exodus 20 makes much more sense if we see man resting like God rested. How can man's pattern of life be seen as parallel to God inhabiting a temple made for His glory?

Several other points can be made from this section as well. First of all, notice that rest is associated with the seventh day, but worship is not, aside from the reference to the day being set apart ("made holy"); we will discuss this in more detail next week. We should also note that the account of the seventh day is used both by those who would see the days of Creation as being of indeterminate length (God is still resting - Hebrews 4:1-11) and those who would argue for a 24-hour duration (Exodus 20:11 clearly refers to 24-hour days).

## THE CREATION OF MAN (2:4-7)

Here we encounter the first of the organizational markers found in the book of Genesis. Verse four tells us that “this is the account of the heavens and the earth.” This organizational marker usually precedes a genealogy and indicates what proceeded from whatever is named (cf. 5:1, where Adam’s descendants are listed). Chapters 2-4 thus give us an account of what proceeded from the creation of the cosmos by God.

The initial focus is on the creation of man, the pinnacle of God’s creative endeavor. Remembering what we have discussed earlier about a focus on function, we see that before the creation of man, no agriculture was taking place; cultivation of plants for food was not occurring because the one assigned to carry out that function had not yet been made. The reference to water for the ground likewise speaks of deliberate human activity - irrigation, which was not yet happening. Whether the watering of the earth in verse six refers to a mist - dew or fog watering the land in the morning - or to the cyclical flooding of major rivers (the Nile is the best-known example of this) is impossible to determine because of the obscurity of the Hebrew word used in the passage. Note that we may not necessarily conclude from this verse that Genesis 6 is the first example of rain falling on the earth.

The creation of man himself emphasizes two things. The first is that man is part of the Creation rather than part of the divine - he is made of the same stuff as the rest of the created order. What we have here is a statement of the Creator-creature distinction. Secondly, we see that human life is a direct gift from God. Note that the distinction is between non-living “dust” and living man, not between not-fully-human manlike creatures and man, as theistic evolutionists would have us believe.

## THE GARDEN OF EDEN (2:8-14)

God prepares an earthly paradise for man to inhabit. The garden is said to be in the East; typically in Scripture all directions are given in reference to the Promised Land in general and Jerusalem in particular, though Moses could have had no knowledge of the role to be played by Jerusalem. The garden contains beautiful and fruitful trees for man to tend and enjoy. It also contains the Tree of Life and the Tree of the Knowledge of Good and Evil, both of which play important roles in the account of the Fall in chapter three. The Tree of Life also reappears elsewhere in Scripture, such as the account of the New Heavens and the New Earth in Revelation 22. The garden is said to be at the headwaters of four rivers. The inclusion of the Tigris and the Euphrates place Eden in northern Mesopotamia (or possibly Armenia, where the sources of these two rivers are located); the identities of the Pishon and Gihon are unknown, though Cush is the Hebrew name for Ethiopia.

## MAN'S DOMINION (2:15-20)

As far as the function of man in the created order is concerned, we have already been told that he is to “have dominion” over all that God has made. Of what is that dominion to consist? Here we find that he is to tend the garden - not surprisingly, the dominion of man is connected with agriculture. We should note in connection with this that the very nature of the dominion described is what is undermined by the Fall in Genesis 3. Man's intended function within God's cosmos is disrupted by man's sin.

Furthermore, man is given one command from God - he is not to eat of the Tree of the Knowledge of Good and Evil; if he does, the result will be death. Note that the Tree of Life is not forbidden to him until after the Fall. Life is a blessing given to man by God before the Fall, but after the Fall it would be a curse, and man is therefore cut off from it as an act of mercy (we will look more at this idea three weeks from today). We should note as well that, prior to the Fall, man knew good and evil, but in a different way than he did after the Fall. Before the Fall, man knew good by experience and evil by contrast, but after the Fall the situation was reversed.

In verse 18 we find the first mention in the Creation account of something that is not good - the fact that man is without a suitable companion. While the obvious reference is to reproduction, we should extend it to all of the functions God assigned to man. Man needs a counterpart like himself. God then brings each member of the animal creation to Adam, and he names them (note that naming is an exercise of authority in the ancient world; this is thus part of Adam's task of exercising dominion), but none is the suitable helper for which he yearns.

## THE CREATION OF EVE (2:21-25)

God then makes a suitable companion for Adam - a counterpart, like him in that she is made of the same “stuff,” but unlike him in that she is a sexual partner. The animals could claim neither of these characteristics. We need not devote time to the mechanics of this operation, since again the purpose of the text is functional. Eve is able to operate as man's counterpart in carrying out their God-designated purposes in the cosmos - reproduction and dominion. Though the term “helper” in and of itself does not imply subordination (the word is most often used of God Himself in the Old Testament), the fact that Adam names Eve as he names the animals implies an authority relationship.

The last two verses of the chapter provide both an additional functional comment and a transition to the next account. Verse 24 tells us that the creation of woman sets the stage for the family - not only independent households, but also the one-flesh union of man and woman that reunites what was separated by the creative act. Verse 25 then speaks of the innocence of the newly-created couple, establishing a contrast, both to the description of the serpent in 3:1 (the words for *naked* and *crafty* sound much alike in Hebrew) and to the consequences of the Fall in 3:7.





## GENESIS 1-11, LESSON IV

### The Theological Significance of Genesis 1-2

Having spent several weeks looking at the questions the culture of the second millennium BC would have asked concerning the cosmos and its form and function, we now must turn to the ways in which Genesis 1-2 set the stage for what follows in Scripture. Today we will look at the theological significance of these foundational chapters.

#### WHO IS GOD?

The first two chapters of Genesis give us many basic facts about God and who He is. Note the following:

- God is eternal, existing before the universe He made (1:1).
- There is only one God. The universe did not come into being as a result of conflict among the members of a polytheistic pantheon (1:1).
- God created all things. Nothing exists that He has not made, including the chaos of Genesis 1:2.
- Several aspects of the early chapters of Genesis allude to the doctrine of the Trinity (1:2, 26 cf. Colossians 1:16).
- God made time, and thus is not subject to it (1:3).
- All God made was good (1:3, etc.). If it is not good now, it is not because of the way God made it.
- God specifically prepared the earth to be inhabited by living creatures, especially man, the pinnacle of His Creation.
- God designed the earth to have seasons (1:14).
- God's Creation was geocentric in the sense that the earth was the focus of all He made (1:17).
- God made all living things "according to their kinds" and intended them to multiply correspondingly (1:11, 21, 24, 25).
- God intended the plants to be food for man and animals (1:29-30). Note that the use of animals for food only appears after the Flood (Genesis 9:2-3).
- The work of Creation was completed at the end of the creative week; it is not an ongoing process (2:1).

#### WHO IS MAN?

The early chapters of Genesis also tell us much about man and who God made him to be:

- Man was a special, direct creation of God (2:7), made in God's image (1:26), unlike God according to creatureliness but like God in personality - intellect, emotions, will, love, communication, but also righteousness and holiness (Ephesians 4:24).

- God gave man dominion over the rest of the created universe (1:26). This implies not only agriculture (2:5, 15), but also science and technology.
- Man was created with distinct gender identities (1:27).
- Like the animals, man was intended to reproduce (1:28).
- Man was intended to labor (2:15). Work is not a result of the Fall, but part of God's created purpose for man.
- Man possesses the power of responsible choice (2:16-17), but is accountable to God for how he uses it. He is thus a free moral agent, but not an autonomous one.
- Death was not initially a part of the human experience (2:17), but was a consequence of human sin. We are intended to be eternal creatures.
- Man was created as a social being (2:18), intended for fellowship and relationships.

#### WHAT IS MAN'S RELATIONSHIP TO GOD?

Again, the chapters tell us much about this:

- As we have already seen, man was made in God's image, thus having a special relationship to Him that none of the other creatures enjoys.
- Man was to imitate God in working six days and resting on the seventh, even as God did in creating the universe (2:3 cf. Exodus 20:8-11). This pattern appears not only in the work week, but also in the agricultural cycle (Leviticus 25:1-7) and as a foretaste of eternal rest in heaven (Hebrews 4:8-11).
- Man's life is a gift of God and is not under man's control (2:7).
- God has the right to limit man's behavior because He created man for His own purposes (2:16-17).

#### WHAT IS MAN'S RELATIONSHIP TO NATURE?

A few obvious conclusions arise from the issues we have already noted:

- Man is distinct from and superior to the rest of the created universe (2:20). God's Creation was not only earth-centered, but also man-centered. He has both the right and the responsibility to control it, not for his own gratification alone, but for the glory of God. Man is thus a steward of something that does not belong to him.
- Stewardship involves developing the natural world, not just leaving it alone as it is. Agriculture is an obvious aspect of this that is clearly set forth in Genesis 1-2, but science and technology are also implied in the Cultural Mandate.

#### WHAT IS MAN'S RELATIONSHIP TO WOMAN?

Basic ideas about this fundamental relationship also appear in these chapters:

- God created mankind in two different genders, equally bearing His image (1:27) yet intended to fulfill distinct roles (2:18 cf. I Timothy 2:13).
- Woman was created for the purpose of companionship, as a co-worker in the exercise of dominion (2:18), and for purposes of reproduction (2:24).
- God established the family as the basic building block of society (2:24). It is no mere sociological construct, nor is it the result of human evolution. Because marriage is of divine design, divorce is a violation of that design and is only permitted in certain extreme circumstances (cf. Matthew 19:1-9).
- Like the rest of God's Creation, man and woman were created in a state of perfection. Their nakedness caused no shame because they were innocent of lust and other sins (2:25).

These chapters thus present a picture of perfect harmony among God, man, woman, and nature - a harmony that was soon to be disrupted by man's sin. Yet we cannot appreciate the significance of Genesis 3 unless we fully grasp the perfection pictured in Genesis 1-2. These chapters tell us that man's current condition is an abnormal one, and that God's gracious intention to restore us to normality - our created condition of perfection and harmony with our Creator and all He has made - is the basic message of the Bible. How God intends to accomplish that restoration is only hinted at in the early chapters of Genesis, but we will see those hints as Moses lays the groundwork for the establishment of the covenant with Abraham and the giving of the law in the book of Exodus.

Note also the implications of these theological truths for the Creation/evolution controversy. How many of the bullet points above are contradicted by the theory of evolution (going through the list with this question in mind might be a useful exercise)? The fact of the matter is that Christians need not involve themselves in detailed scientific debates in order to refute Darwinism. If the first two chapters of Genesis are true, Darwinism cannot be true. No comparison more clearly indicates the errors, and the dangers, associated with Christians who would attempt to compromise with the scientific community on these issues. "Theistic evolution" is an oxymoron of the worst kind.



## **GENESIS 1-11, LESSON V**

### The Fall and Its Significance (Genesis 3:1-13)

If the first two chapters lay the foundation for the story of the Bible, chapter three sets the plot in motion. The first significant actions by Adam and Eve cut them off from God, leaving the rest of the Bible to describe what God does to remedy man's plight.

#### THE FALL AND PAGAN MYTHOLOGY

Many echoes of the Fall narrative may be found in the literature of the ancient Near East. References include the serpent as a symbol of wisdom and death and man's inability to achieve immortality because of foolish choices he makes (or, in one case, because a serpent eats the magic food that would grant immortality to man). While many would argue that the existence of such references suggests the derivative nature of the biblical account, we should instead view them as evidence that the truth of what happened to the first couple was preserved, albeit in distorted form, through the ages in the traditions of men who had strayed far from the worship of the True God.

#### THE TEMPTER (3:1a)

Because we approach this passage from the mindset of New Testament teaching, we already assume that the serpent is Satan. We must note, however, that nothing in the passage itself indicates that such is the case. In fact, nothing in the Old Testament indicates that the Israelites identified the serpent with Satan, though we know from the New Testament (cf. John 8:44; Romans 16:20; Revelation 12:9; 20:2) that Satan was in some way speaking through the beautiful animal that God had created. Eve certainly would not have recognized Satan in the serpent, though one can only imagine how she would have reacted when the beast started talking. Even the description given in the text does not necessarily present him as being evil; the word translated *crafty* may be used to describe a desirable form of wisdom - cf. Proverbs 1:4; 8:5; 15:5. In fact, the word serves as a contrast to the naivete of Adam and Eve as described in 2:25 (the original Hebrew contains a play on words because the words translated *naked* and *crafty* have similar sounds). The New Testament, of course, leaves us in no doubt as to the true identity of the being speaking through the mouth of the serpent.

#### THE CONVERSATION (3:1b-5)

In the conversation, Satan speaks only twice. The first time he misrepresents God's words, then later he directly contradicts God and goes on to impugn His character and motives. Eve, on the other hand, speaks only once, and in the process gives the gist of God's command with her own little twist - God had not prohibited touching the tree, only eating its fruit, and He had spoken of certain death as the penalty for disobedience rather than immediate death (the subtle difference between the syntax of 2:17 and 3:3). What is the significance of this exchange? Note the following:

- Satan immediately tries to shape God’s command into something unfair and unreasonable. He does not initially call God a liar, but raises questions about the nature of His law.
- Man is initially more likely to add to God’s law than to take away from it. “Fencing the law” existed in the heart of man long before it appeared in rabbinical tradition.
- The craftiness of Satan is demonstrated when, in responding to Eve’s description of God’s command, he contradicts her wording rather than God’s (“You will not immediately die”). Technically, he speaks the truth, even in what he promises (cf. 3:22, where God confirms that what Satan had promised had actually occurred). Thus Satan lures with half-truths much more frequently than with overt lies. Notice, then, that Satan implies both that God is a liar and that God is not good without ever actually saying either of these things.
- Satan is offering what God has already given. Adam and Eve were already “like God,” having been made in His image. They had everything they needed, but were being led to believe that the good could be obtained apart from God, and that God was holding out on them because of a desire to protect His own turf.

### THE RESPONSE (3:6)

Up until this point, God is the only one who is said to have seen that something was good. He is presented as the only arbiter of goodness. Now, however, Eve takes that role upon herself, making herself an independent judge of goodness, and thus asserting her own autonomy over against the authority of God (note that this is true even though her judgment is essentially accurate - cf. 2:9). She thus sinned before she ate the fruit; her sin consisted of her assertion of absolute autonomy, not just in her act of open disobedience. Sin has its roots in the heart, and Eve’s heart turned against God before her teeth bit into the forbidden fruit.

We should note also that Satan’s tactics do not change. The temptations he laid before Eve are the same ones he put before Christ and the same ones to which Christians are subject today. If we compare this passage with Matthew 4:1-11 and I John 2:16 we see this very clearly:

Genesis 3:6	Matthew 4:1-11	I John 2:16
“good for food”	turning stones to bread	“the cravings of sinful man”
“pleasant to the eye”	leaping from the Temple	“the lust of his eyes”
“desirable for gaining wisdom”	gaining the kingdoms of the world	“the boasting of what he has and does”

Thus we are to be encouraged that the same temptations to which the first Adam succumbed were the ones resisted by the Second Adam, and that because He successfully resisted the lures of Satan then (Hebrews 4:15), He can do so now in the lives of His people.

We should also take note of Adam's role in the whole situation. He was clearly present at the time of the temptation; this was not the scenario painted by Milton in *Paradise Lost* where Eve foolishly removes herself from her husband's protection, and he, finding out what had happened after the damage was done, nobly sacrificed himself in order to avoid being separated from his beloved wife. No, Adam was there, all right, and partook of the fruit with his eyes open. If anything, his mistake was in letting his wife do the talking (if this were an e-mail, one would insert an emoticon at this point. . .). Seriously, however, the New Testament does derive theological significance from the fact that Eve took the lead in this dialogue. Paul finds in this account part of his justification for denying women leadership roles in the church (I Timothy 2:14; note also that verse 15 indicates that the "suitable helper" reference in Genesis 2:18 *does* imply role differentiation).

### THE RESULT (3:7)

Commentators over the years have gotten quite creative in their explanations for the actual eating of the fruit and its consequences. Some, of course, have argued that the story is a metaphor for sexual awakening, and that the "forbidden fruit" was sexual intercourse. While this perhaps explains the shame that results, it clearly contradicts the fact that God commanded them to "be fruitful and multiply" when he made them. More recently, some have argued that the forbidden wisdom was not something bad in itself, but something that God intended for Adam and Eve to have after a suitable period of growth and maturation. Their sin was thus a matter of grasping for a good thing before the right time. Under this interpretation, the fruit of the tree becomes a sort of hormonal stimulant, pushing the childlike (2:25) new couple into puberty before God intended it to happen. Both the sexual awareness and the moral discernment that comes with puberty were thus attained before God's intended time, and the result was shame and alienation from God.

The traditional interpretation, which I still believe to be best, sees the fruit as a symbol of an altered moral condition. Before the Fall, Adam and Eve knew good by experience - they had been placed in an environment in which everything around them was good, as they themselves were. They knew evil, however, only by contrast - they had never experienced it, but knew only that it was what God had told them not to do. After the Fall, however, they now knew moral evil by experience, but - and Satan had failed to mention this one little piece of information - they now were no longer able to experience moral good.

Note that this interpretation makes the actual test itself totally arbitrary. God could have told them not to swim in a certain river or walk on a particular plot of grass. The alteration did not occur because of the fruit itself, but because of the change that occurred in the hearts of Adam and Eve. Nothing about the tree itself set it apart from other trees aside from the fact that God had forbidden it; no qualities, either of beauty or ugliness, could have pushed the first couple in the direction of either obedience or disobedience. The test was a very simple and uncomplicated one - are you going to obey God or are you going to decide for yourself what is good and right?

Consequently, the alteration in the first couple was a moral one. They experienced shame about something good that God had given them - their bodies. Why? Because their thoughts were

no longer pure, but lustful. They quickly grabbed the biggest thing they could find to cover themselves (fig leaves were the biggest ones known to the Israelites, and presumably the biggest ones in the Garden of Eden).

#### THE TRIAL (3:8-13)

God then arrived on the scene. In what form we do not know, but the word used to describe the sound heard by Adam and Eve suggests that they did not hear gentle footsteps in the fallen leaves, but the sound of thunder associated elsewhere in Scripture with God's power and judgment (the phrase translated "the cool of the day" may also be read as "the wind of the storm" - cf. Exodus 19:16; Job 38:1). The fact that Adam and Eve quickly hid themselves is thus not surprising.

God initiates the conversation with the guilty pair, and they condemn themselves from their own mouths (*now* Adam decides to take the initiative!). Both their different attitude toward their nakedness and their different attitude toward God reveal what they have done before they admit anything. Both then immediately proceed to attempt to shift the blame for what happened - Adam blaming the woman and Eve blaming the serpent. Both, of course, are really blaming God - Adam saying that the source of evil was one of God's good gifts, and Eve in a lesser sense doing the same (remember, she had no way of knowing that Satan was in the snake). In fact, Adam was now asserting that God's conclusion that "it is not good for the man to be alone" had been a mistake in judgment; after all, if God had never given Eve to him, Adam surely would never have fallen! Thus we see the judgments that God is about to voice (and which will be the subject of next week's lesson) already taking place - separations between man and God, man and woman, and man and nature where before there had been nothing but harmony. Such are the consequences of sin.



## GENESIS 1-11, LESSON VI

### The Curse and Its Significance (Genesis 3:14-24)

As a result of man's sin, everything changes, and these changes define the world in which we find ourselves. The abnormality of that world, the deviation from God's intention, and the need for and promise of redemption all find their roots in this important passage.

#### THE CURSE ON THE SERPENT (3:14-15)

Contrary to some critical opinion, this is not an explanation of why women hate snakes. The serpent, the instrument of the Tempter, is condemned to crawl on its belly and eat dust. The text does not tell us anything about the previous condition of the serpent - did it move upright or have wings? - we simply have no way of knowing. What the text does tell us is that the tool of Satan is forced to assume the posture of defeat (Psalm 72:9; Isaiah 49:23; Lamentations 3:29; Micah 7:17); rather than moving in a striking posture, it must crawl.

In verse 15, God speaks of an ongoing conflict between the woman and the serpent that will continue through successive generations. This will lead to mutual attacks (the words for *crush* and *strike* come from the same root in Hebrew). Historically this verse has been called the *protoevangelium* - the first hint of the Gospel in the Scriptures. Though later passages only allude to the significance of this verse in very vague terms (Romans 16:20 speaks of Satan being crushed under the feet of the Church and Galatians 3:16 explains that the *seed* is a reference to Christ, although Paul alludes to the Abrahamic Covenant rather than to Genesis 3), the identification of the Tempter as Satan and the central position of redemption in the Genesis narrative (and, indeed, in all of Scripture) would point toward the legitimacy of seeing in this verse the initial indication of God's intention to redeem fallen mankind.

#### THE CURSE ON THE WOMAN (3:16)

Here we see that the curse pronounced upon the woman strikes at the basic functions for which she had been created in the first place. She was to be a suitable helper for her husband in carrying out the functions of reproduction and dominion. Here we find that both of those functions are impeded by sin. The source of the woman's greatest joy also becomes the source of her greatest pain, reminding her continually of her role in the Fall and its consequences. Furthermore, the relationship between man and woman, intended to be one of loving leadership and willing submission, now becomes a source of conflict. The woman no longer willingly submits to the man's leadership, but seeks to dominate the relationship (cf. Genesis 4:7, where the same term is used for *desire*), whereas the man is tempted to become a tyrant rather than a loving leader.

Like the curse on the serpent, this section too contains its element of promise. The woman may experience pain in childbirth, but it is ultimately through the reproductive function of the woman that redemption will come. Her seed will finally defeat the evil that brought Adam and Eve to their present condition (cf. I Timothy 2:15).

## THE CURSE ON THE MAN (3:17-19)

The curse on the man also strikes directly at the function for which he had been created by God. Here the emphasis is on dominion, with a special focus on agriculture. The ground is now cursed so that it no longer cooperates with man's attempts to manage it. Labor, one of the original functions of man, now becomes painful and harsh. He must struggle against thorns and thistles for the food he needs to survive, and will ultimately lose the battle - he will return to the dust from which God made him.

Where do we find hope in connection with this aspect of the curse? Paul tells us in Romans 8:19-22 that the entire Creation will one day be freed from this curse. As in the deliverance promised through the woman, the image of childbirth is prominent in Paul's description. The birth of a child will reverse the curse, with the result that the whole Creation will be reborn.

## CURSE AND BLESSING IMPLEMENTED (3:20-24)

In the verses that follow, we find the curses pronounced by God taking shape. In verse 20, Adam renames his wife (he had already named her in 2:23). This time, her name reflects her function rather than her origin - she is to be a mother, and thus reflects the hope that God had given, even in the midst of the curse. Through her came sin, but also through her will come redemption.

In verse 21 God shows his mercy toward Adam and Eve by giving them the clothing they will need to survive in the now-inhospitable fallen world. The animal skins would certainly have provided more effective protection than the temporary expedient of the fig leaves they had provided for themselves. Though the passage says nothing about sacrifice in this context (nor does any other passage in Scripture make the connection), the death of the animals in order to provide these coverings for man's nakedness at least may be seen as foreshadowing the idea that without the shedding of blood there is no remission of sin (Hebrews 9:22).

Verses 22-23 indicate that man's knowledge of good and evil had reached the place against which God had warned them, and that this was not a good situation (could the idea that "man has now become like one of us" reflect God's direct encounter with sin in the rebellion of Satan?). Again, we find God responding in mercy. Rather than leaving fallen humanity to their own devices, He makes sure they are not confirmed forever in their state of wickedness, rebellion, and alienation. Thus the expulsion from the Garden of Eden is both a punishment and an act of God's mercy, like the other aspects of the curse. We should note in passing here that the cherubim are angelic beings often associated with God's presence (Exodus 25:18-22; Ezekiel 10).

## SIGNIFICANCE - ALIENATION AND ABNORMALITY

As Francis Schaeffer pointed out in his book *Genesis in Space and Time*, the Fall and the curse that follows it signify fundamental alienation in every area of God's perfect Creation. Because of his sin, man is alienated from God (3:10), from himself (3:7), from other people (3:12), and from

the rest of the created order (3:17-19). Man's conflicts on every level - spiritual, psychological, sociological, and ecological - thus find their roots in the Fall. Because of this fundamental biblical teaching, we must recognize that anyone who looks for the foundations of human problems in anything other than man's sinful rebellion against God is looking in the wrong place.

Ultimate solutions to man's problems will never come from those who assume that man is basically good and that nature is basically amenable to human endeavor. Scripture paints a far different picture - one in which the entire cosmos is in a state of *abnormality*. This is an important component of the Christian worldview. If the world is as it always was, if man is always as he was, then there is no real hope that things will ever be different from the way they are now. But if we live in an abnormal world, different from the way God created it to be, there is hope for change - the expectation that the brokenness of the world will not last forever and that God will indeed redeem His fallen Creation. Such redemption, of course, is the only true basis for hope concerning anything in this broken world of ours.

#### SIGNIFICANCE - MERCY AND REDEMPTION

As we have already seen, the account of God's response to man's sin illustrates not only God's holiness, but also His love and mercy. From the very beginning, God demonstrates His intention to reverse the reversal that man brought about through his rebellion. He not only seeks out sinful man, pitifully attempting to hide from Him, but He provides a covering for their shame and promises that the very things that have been cursed - the reproductive process and the earth itself - will become in His hands instruments of restoration as He brings His redeemer through the seed of the woman and renews the cursed earth to its original pristine condition. Furthermore, He promises that the source of all this evil, as represented by the serpent, will finally be crushed and defeated. How will He do all these things? The rest of the book of Genesis, and indeed the rest of the Bible, answers that fundamental question and illuminates the foundational promise that God gave to His fallen creatures.



## **GENESIS 1-11, LESSON VII**

### Cain and Abel and the Line of Cain (Genesis 4)

The chapters that follow the description of the Fall of Man show us how the consequences of that devastating choice are worked out in the human race. Our first indication of the changes that have been caused by sin is found in the familiar story at the beginning of chapter 4, but we will see also how the latter portion of the chapter demonstrates the interactions of the rebellion of man and the grace of God.

#### LIFE IN A CURSED WORLD (4:1-2)

The two functions assigned to man after the Creation were to reproduce and to exercise dominion over the earth and its inhabitants. Chapter four pictures Adam and Eve and their family doing just those things. Adam and Eve begin to produce offspring, with Eve giving birth to Cain and Abel. Many interpretations have been placed on Eve's naming statement following the birth of her firstborn, which literally reads, "Like the Lord I have brought forth a man." Is this a word of arrogance in which Eve is suggesting that she, too, can do what God did when He made Adam? Is she alluding to Genesis 3:15 and suggesting that Cain is the promised Messiah? Is she, like Sarah later on, trying to fulfill God's promise without waiting for God's time, and thus on her own proclaiming Cain to be the promised seed? None of these explanations really fits the context, since Eve's proclamation is not pictured as in any way negative and her understanding of the *protoevangelium* is likely to have been limited at best. The common translation, "With the help of the Lord I have brought forth a man" (NIV), reflects an elision common both in Hebrew and the cognate languages and implies that Eve is acknowledging that she needed God's help to fulfill her designated function because of the consequences of the curse, especially regarding childbirth (cf. 3:16).

Cain and Abel grow up and choose occupations, both of which fulfill different aspects of man's dominion over the earth - agriculture and animal husbandry. The work of drawing sustenance from the earth may be hard, but God still enables the land to provide for man's needs though he must work by the sweat of his brow.

#### THE TWO OFFERINGS (4:3-7)

The offerings brought by Cain and Abel have generated considerable debate. Why was the offering of Cain rejected while that of Abel was accepted? Several suggestions have been advanced by commentators:

- Abel offered a blood sacrifice while Cain did not. But we find in the text no indication that God had demanded blood sacrifice. Furthermore, the word used for the offerings the brothers brought means *gift* rather than *sacrifice*, and such offerings in the Old Testament consisted of grain more often than they consisted of animals.

- Abel brought the result of God’s bounty while Cain brought the work of his own hands. But Abel had to keep the flock, while Cain’s harvest depended every bit as much on God’s provision as did the offspring of Abel’s sheep and goats (the first domesticated animals).
- Abel brought his best (“fat portions,” “the firstborn”) while Cain just brought a token sample. But the words for *fruits* and *firstborn* are the same. Both men gave thanks to God for meeting their material needs by offering to Him some of what He had given them.
- We don’t know. God accepted Abel’s and rejected Cain’s as a mark of His sovereignty. Just as he loved Jacob and hated Esau, Cain was cast off while Abel was embraced. As noted below, however, the New Testament does not support this interpretation. God’s response was not arbitrary.
- The difference lay in the attitudes of the two men’s hearts. Abel brought his offering with a heart of faith (Hebrews 11:4) while Cain gave his offering begrudgingly and out of a heart of anger (I John 3:12).

The attitude of Cain’s heart is revealed in his reaction when God distinguishes between the two gifts. Rather than submitting to God’s judgment and approaching Him with a righteous heart, he becomes angry, both with God and his brother. God then tells him that two doors are open before him - the door of repentance and obedience and the door of domination by the sinful passions of his heart. Sin here is pictured as a vicious animal crouching outside the door waiting to attack Cain (cf. I Peter 5:8). As Abel exercises dominion over his domesticated animals, Cain must control this wild animal outside his door.

#### THE MURDER AND ITS CONSEQUENCES (4:8-12)

Moses gives us no details regarding the murder itself, simply telling us that Cain lured his brother out into a field and killed him. Of the surrounding circumstances we know nothing other than that the murder was clearly premeditated. The conversation that follows is very similar to that recorded in Genesis 3:9-13, 17-19 - God’s question, an evasive answer, and a curse relating to the land.

God’s question, rather than concerning the whereabouts of the sinner, concerned the whereabouts of the victim. Unlike Adam and Eve, who had explanations for everything, Cain claims ignorance. One commentator noted the irony in the fact that, while Adam and Eve had eaten the fruit because they craved knowledge, their offspring here seeks refuge in his lack of knowledge. We should also note that the progression of sin in the human race leads to the destruction of the fundamental building block of human society, the family. Not only does Cain kill Abel, but proceeds to deny any accountability for his welfare. The family, the first and most important institution of society, begins to deteriorate almost immediately after the Fall. We should also note in passing that the accusatory voice of the blood of Abel will later be replaced by the voice of mercy spoken by the blood of Christ (Hebrews 12:24).

The curse placed on Cain further alienates him from the soil that was intended to provide his sustenance. He was a farmer, and the land is cursed for his sake so that it no longer produces crops for him (note that this is a step beyond the curse placed on Adam, for whom the land would produce food, but only by the sweat of his brow). Cain is condemned to a nomadic existence, forced initially to make his way in life by the same means used by his dead brother.

#### REPENTANCE AND ITS CONSEQUENCES (4:13-16)

Verse 13 is in many ways the central verse in the chapter, and our interpretation of it determines the way in which we evaluate what follows. Traditionally, Cain's response to God has been translated, "My punishment is more than I can bear." Interestingly, however, the word translated *punishment* is more than 95% of the time in the Old Testament translated *iniquity*. The former translation thus involves an implied ellipsis, "[The result of] my iniquity is more than I can bear." The difference between the two is significant. While the traditional translation shows Cain complaining about the harshness of his punishment, the suggested alternative puts in his mouth words of repentance. In my opinion, the latter fits the context much better for a number of reasons:

- Cain is concerned not just about the loss of his livelihood, but about separation from God (4:14). His desire for God's presence is a positive indicator of a change of heart.
- He recognized that he deserved death for what he had done to his brother. His comment anticipates the role of the avenger of blood in early Israelite society (Numbers 35, Deuteronomy 19, and Joshua 20 all deal with the avenger of blood in the context of the establishment of the Cities of Refuge in the land).
- God's decision to protect Cain is much better understood as a response to an act of repentance rather than as an expedient to allow for more rapid expansion of the human race. The ease with which Cain found a wife seems to indicate that Adam and Eve were more than fulfilling their responsibility in that area.
- God's forgiveness and mercy towards Cain do not, however, cause Him to retract His punishment. Cain is still forced to leave his family, and in so doing is cast out of the presence of the Lord as well (4:16).

Note that we do not know what the mark God placed on Cain involved, but it certainly was not, as some racist scholars suggested in the past, black skin. We do not, in fact, know anything about the pigmentation of our first parents. Modern anthropology has concluded that they themselves would have been black, though this is based on the assumption that human life began in Africa, while the biblical assertion that it began in the Middle East would lead one to conclude that their pigmentation might have been more like inhabitants of that region today.

We should also note in passing that this text is often used as an argument against capital punishment. The gist of the argument is that God's handling of the first murder should be seen as

a precedent for all that follow, so that the mercy of God toward Cain should set the pattern for our approach more than the long list of capital crimes found in the Mosaic law, which can be explained away as God adopting expedients because of the hardness of men's hearts that did not really reflect His true intention for human behavior (cf. Matthew 19:1-9, where Jesus indicates that the Old Testament law concerning divorce was such an expedient). The text supports no such argument. Instead, we see what happened here as an exception, since not only did Cain understand that death would have been the fitting punishment for his crime, but God also decreed the death of anyone who killed Cain ("suffer vengeance seven times over" is a Hebrew intensive, indicating that whoever kills Cain will *surely* receive retribution).

#### THE LINE OF CAIN AND ITS ACHIEVEMENTS (4:17-24)

In many older commentaries, the line of Cain is seen as the seed of rebellion and godlessness. Interpreters thus see indications of evil in the achievements ascribed to Cain's descendants. What we find, however, is that, despite the curse keeping them from a settled agricultural existence, the blessing of God extended to the point of enabling them to continue to fulfill their God-given functions as human beings. Cain marries (or perhaps had already married) one of his sisters, and they give birth to children (note that the richness of the gene pool did not make marriage with close relatives a danger to the race until much later; Abraham married his half-sister, though by the time of the giving of the Law by Moses marrying close relatives was prohibited). Cain and his descendants become builders of cities (the alternative form of settled existence to agriculture) and engage in animal husbandry, the arts, and technology. Note that these quite legitimate forms of dominion appear in less than ten generations after Adam (next week we will discuss issues surrounding the age of the human race).

We do see, however, that sin is also advancing within the line of Cain. In Lamech we find both polygamy and an attitude toward murder that differs considerably from that of Cain. Though Lamech pleads self-defense, his response to the attack upon his person hardly fits the *lex talionis* of the Hebrew law (cf. Exodus 21:23-25), nor does his boastful claim to God's protection. He appears quite ready, with his desire for seventy-sevenfold vengeance, to start a clan war over the incident if necessary.

#### GODLY SEED AND TRUE WORSHIP (4:25-26)

But all is not lost. In the same way that God provides a way for Cain and his line to continue to fulfill the functions of the human race, so God provides for the coming of the seed He had promised. The birth of Seth begins a pattern visible throughout Genesis in which the younger son is the bearer of the line of promise (e.g., Isaac, Jacob, and Judah). We are also told here at the end of the chapter that not only does God provide for the perpetuation of the seed, but He also sets aside for Himself a remnant who will practice true worship. As is the case throughout the book of Genesis, Moses, having summarized the history of the line that will not bear the promise, now turns in greater detail to the line that has been chosen by God as seed-bearers.



## GENESIS 1-11, LESSON VIII

### The Genesis Genealogies and the Age of Man (Genesis 5)

When reading the book of Genesis, one often has a tendency to skip over the genealogies. After all, what of interest or value could one expect to find in a list of “begats”? In today’s lesson, however, we will find that the genealogy in Genesis 5 is significant, not only for our consideration of the relationship of the Bible to scientific questions, but also for our understanding of the theology of the early chapters of the first book of Scripture. We will begin the lesson by considering a few key aspects of the text itself, then turn to various questions raised by the chapter.

#### INTRODUCTION (5:1-3)

The introduction to the genealogy marks out the beginning of a new segment of the narrative with the repetition of the organizing formula in verse 1 (cf. 2:4); this formula occurs a total of eleven times in Genesis. What follows, then, is the outworking of the previous events concerning Adam and Eve.

Two points should be noted in the introduction to the genealogy. The first is the allusion to the creation of man by God in Genesis 1 - the function for which man was created by God is still intact, as is God’s intention to bless the people He has made. Secondly, the parallels in the description of Adam’s relationship to God and Seth’s relationship to Adam place God in the position of the Father of the human race. That this language is found in the genealogy of Seth rather than that of Cain does not mean that the line of Cain lacks humanity, but indicates that the line of Seth is the chosen one through which God will fulfill His promises. In order for God to be the Father of Israel, He must first be the Father of Seth.

#### THE GENEALOGY ITSELF (5:3-32)

The genealogy itself is very formulaic: “When \_\_\_\_\_ had lived \_\_\_\_\_ years, he became the father of \_\_\_\_\_. And after he became the father of \_\_\_\_\_, \_\_\_\_\_ lived \_\_\_\_\_ years and had other sons and daughters. Altogether, \_\_\_\_\_ lived \_\_\_\_\_ years, and then he died.” An examination of the formula reveals the theological significance of the genealogy, however. The two major themes are reproduction and death - the indicators of the continuity of both the blessing and the curse. Man continues to “be fruitful and multiply,” producing “seed” through whom the promise will ultimately be fulfilled, while at the same time “death reigns from Adam to Moses” (Romans 5:14). Sin and its consequences are inherited by all the offspring of Adam and Eve. The genealogy thus shows the ongoing nature of both blessing and curse, while connecting the narrative of Adam and Eve to the story of the Flood.

#### THE FIGURE OF ENOCH (5:22-24)

Two figures in the genealogy are singled out for further comment. The first of these is Enoch, the seventh name in the list (interestingly, Lamech, the one singled out for comment in the

genealogy of Cain, also occupies the seventh position - see note on the structure of biblical genealogies below). Enoch is described as a righteous man because he “walked with God.” The same phrase is used to describe Noah (6:9) and Abraham (17:1). Several points should be noted in connection with this phrase. First of all, while the Pentateuch pictures the Law as failing to reverse the effects of the curse, these references show that man does have hope, and that his hope lies, not in the Law, but in a personal relationship with the Creator. Secondly, the experience of Enoch shows that the curse of death may be avoided; Paul details how in I Corinthians 15. Thirdly, the references to “walking with God” show that those who do so still experience the consequences of sin - all die but Enoch, and Noah falls into the shameful situation described at the end of Genesis 9, while Abraham demonstrates sinful weakness in many ways while continuing to live by faith.

We should also note in passing that Enoch becomes a significant figure in Jewish pseudepigraphal literature (*I, II, and III Enoch*). He is pictured as prophesying judgment and speaking in apocalyptic terms of the last days (cf. Jude 14-15, where Jude makes a literary allusion without necessarily confirming the historicity of apocryphal literature).

#### THE FIGURE OF NOAH (5:29-32)

Noah is the other figure in the genealogy of Seth to whom special attention is given. In fact, one might even view the Flood story as the longest narrative interlude in the genealogy that connects Adam to Abraham, the father of the Jewish people. In Genesis 5, the commentary given concerns the naming of Noah. He is a child named with hope for the removal of the curse (cf. naming of Seth in 4:25). Noah will in some senses fulfill the meaning of his name - he not only becomes the vehicle for the preservation of the human race in the time of God’s judgment, but to him also is the promise given that another such judgment will never be poured out on mankind. In giving rest from judgment, he prefigures One who will remove the threat of judgment once and for all (I Peter 3:20-21).

#### THE AGE OF THE HUMAN RACE

We now turn to some of the questions raised by this genealogy, the first of which is the age of the human race. The most famous attempt to use the biblical genealogies to calculate chronology was that of Irish Archbishop James Ussher, who in the seventeenth century calculated that Creation occurred in the year 4004 BC. He began with a generally accepted date for Abraham (about 2000 BC), then simply used the numbers in the genealogies and worked backwards. A slightly later contemporary of Ussher, John Lightfoot, actually taught that Creation had occurred on October 23<sup>rd</sup>, 4004 BC, at 9:00 in the morning - Greenwich Mean Time! Ussher’s dates were included in Bibles for several hundred years following his studies - including the enormously influential Scofield Reference Bible, which popularized both Ussher’s dates and the Gap Theory in our own country. Most scholars today, however, believe that the genealogies cannot be used for calculating purposes, at least not in any specific or detailed way, because of the existence of discontinuities in the lists.

The groundbreaking work in this area was done by William Henry Green, professor at Princeton Theological Seminary back in the latter years of the nineteenth century, when Princeton was still evangelical. He demonstrated conclusively that the biblical genealogies were not intended to be complete records of every generation, but rather were selective, including only those ancestors considered to be important, and structured, often following a pre-designed mathematical pattern.

A few examples should suffice, though many could be given. To begin with, the genealogy of Jesus given in Matthew 1:1-17 clearly reveals these characteristics. Not only does the first verse summarize the genealogy that follows by giving the three most crucial names, but verse 8 leaves out the names of three kings of Judah (Ahaziah, Joash, and Amaziah) between Joram and Uzziah. The intended mathematical structure is given explicitly in verse 17 - could this have been to put Jesus at the head of the seventh seven? The omissions are not errors, nor are they attempts to deceive, but they do tell us something about the Jewish practice in constructing genealogies.

That the same thing is going on in Genesis 5 and 11 is clear. A comparison of Luke 3:36 and Genesis 11:12 shows that the earlier genealogy omits the name of Cainan (though the name does appear in the Septuagint version), showing that some selectivity was at work. Furthermore, the mathematical structure appears in that both Genesis genealogies contain ten names, the last of which has three sons.

Whatever the purpose of the genealogies, then, it was not to permit calculation of the age of the human race. The old joke, "How did Methuselah die?" simply will not work (the answer was "He drowned" because calculations based on the genealogies and assuming them to be complete and consecutive would lead to the conclusion that Methuselah died in the Flood, or at least in the year of the Flood).

## THE AGES OF THE PATRIARCHS

At one time, scholars attempted to argue that the ages of the antediluvians listed in Genesis 5 were based on a lunar calendar - in other words, the ages were given in months rather than years. This might make some sense if one looks at the ages at death - 960 years thus becomes 80 and seems rather reasonable - but is absurd when one looks at the ages at which these men conceived children. Some would have been reproducing at the age of five and a half! Modern scientists simply write off the ages given for the antediluvian patriarchs as being beyond belief. If we take the authority of Scripture seriously, however, we must also take these ages seriously. It should be noted that other ancient records show even longer lifespans for the ancients. The king lists of Sumer and the old Babylonian civilization include men who lived tens of thousands of years. Is the genealogy of Genesis 5 simply a more conservative version of one of these ancient myths of the god-kings? In fact, evidence indicates that the Sumerian and Babylonian records may be corruptions of an earlier list that is faithfully recorded in Genesis. The early civilizations of Mesopotamia used a sexagesimal number system (base 60, as opposed to our decimal system - base 10). By the time the records were set down, however, they had switched to a decimal system, but were still using the old sexagesimal symbols. If the numbers on the old cuneiform records are read as sexagesimal rather than decimal,

however, they bear a remarkable resemblance (as do the names, in fact) to those given in Genesis 5. If, indeed, one assumes that the scribes in the declining days of Ur wrote down an old sexagesimal record under the assumption that its numbers were in the decimal system (i.e., they made a mistake in reading their own ancient records), what they left behind corroborates the account of Genesis 5 to a remarkable degree.

In addition, the decline in lifespan after the Flood corresponds closely to what scientists have shown would occur when an organism was exposed to a dramatically increased amount of radioactivity. If, in fact, the Flood involved the collapse of a water canopy surrounding the earth (an hypothesis for which no concrete evidence exists), the increase in cosmic radiation penetrating the atmosphere, combined with the watering down of the gene pool through increased population, would contribute to a significant decrease in the average lifespan. Whatever the reason, increased radioactivity in the atmosphere appears to have occurred as a result of the Flood.

Some Christians choose to deal with inconvenient scientific evidence by placing it into a supposed gap between the first two verses of Genesis. This is far too facile to be satisfying, and lacks one shred of concrete biblical support. Other Christians accept the scientific evidence at face value, but then are forced to relegate the Genesis account of the creation of man to the realm of myth or allegory. In addition, the doctrine of original sin must be jettisoned, but few who have gone so far seem to regret its loss.

While we may not be able to use the biblical genealogies to establish a specific date for Creation or a concrete age for the human race, we must affirm that the biblical account, while leaving room for perhaps as much as twenty thousand years of human history, certainly cannot accommodate two or three million years without reducing the genealogies of Genesis, and some basic biblical doctrine along with them, to meaninglessness.

## GENESIS 1-11, LESSON IX

### The Flood - Textual Issues (Genesis 6-9)

We now arrive at the most important incident narrated between the Fall and the story of Abraham - the great Flood. As we have seen in our studies so far, the Flood narrative speaks both of the progression of the curse and the ongoing presence of God's mercy. We will spend two weeks on the Flood, looking first at textual issues and then at scientific and archaeological questions.

#### THE SONS OF GOD AND THE DAUGHTERS OF MAN (6:1-4)

The first question that arises in the study of the Flood account is this cryptic reference to "the sons of God" and "the daughters of men." To whom do these terms refer, and what is the significance of their intermarriage? Commentators have, as with most obscure passages, come up with a variety of creative explanations, including the following:

- The "sons of God" were the descendants of Seth and the "daughters of men" were the descendants of Cain. The passage thus would picture God condemning the intermarriage of the godly line of promise with the rebellious line of the accursed murderer. Note, however, that this fails to explain the significance of verse 4, nor do we find any prohibition of such intermarriage in the preceding chapter.
- The "sons of God" were fallen angels and the "daughters of men" were human women. Commentators who go this route see in it an explanation for the half-human monstrosities to whom verse 4 may allude, as well as a justification for the drastic judgment that follows. Unfortunately, Scripture gives no indication whatsoever that angels, fallen or otherwise, who are spiritual beings, have the ability to cohabit with humans. In fact, Matthew 22:30 teaches the contrary.
- The explanation that seems to me to fit the context best is that the "sons of God" are human rulers and that the "daughters of men" are simply human women. We know from massive evidence from ancient cultures that rulers in the ancient world were deified by their people (note the pharaohs of Egypt, though they certainly were not unique in this respect). The deplorable behavior described in these verses would thus be the *jus primae noctis* - the "right of the first night" - in which the ruler could take any young woman he chose to bed on her wedding night and seek to conceive by her. Note that this perfectly fits the description in verse 4, and furthermore shows the extent to which human wickedness had undermined the family structure, perverting even marriage itself and thus bringing about God's judgment. Note that these Nephilim are referred to again in Numbers 13:33 when the Israelites are intimidated from entering the land; though their progenitors were wiped out in the Flood, the practices associated with them were perpetuated in the curse line of Canaan (see comments below on the end of chapter 9). Note also that, even in this wicked environment, God gives the mercy of a 120-year warning period.

## THE SETTING FOR THE GREAT FLOOD (6:5-8)

The reason given for the Flood is the sinfulness of mankind, and no distinction is made between the different families that descended from Adam and Eve (we should note in passing that in the pagan flood myths, the reason typically given is that men are too noisy to allow the gods to get enough rest, so they decide to wipe out the human race). The animals, who shared man's curse, are also to share man's judgment despite no fault on their part. God's mercy again shines through, however, in his decision to spare Noah.

## BUILDING THE ARK (6:9-7:10)

The choice of Noah as the new progenitor of the human race is not an arbitrary one. He like his forebear Enoch is said to have "walked with God," and on this basis is described as righteous and is distinguished from the rest of the human population among whom he lives. Noah's righteousness and the wickedness of his neighbors are both given attention in the New Testament. We are told in Hebrews 11:7 that Noah's obedience in building the ark makes him an example of faith, and in II Peter 2:5 he is called a "preacher of righteousness." In I Peter 3:20-21 the deliverance of Noah and his family is compared to the salvific cleansing represented by baptism. As far as Noah's neighbors are concerned, Jesus in Matthew 24:37-39 compares the oblivious citizens of the ancient world who were blithely unaware of the coming judgment to those who will be caught unawares by the coming of Christ Himself.

Noah then is told of the coming judgment and instructed concerning the building of the ark and the collection of animals. He is to include two of all kinds for reproduction and seven of clean beasts - despite the fact that designations of clean and unclean had not yet been given - for food for the carnivores and sacrifice as well as reproduction, and stores of grains and grasses for food. Note that the animals come to him (7:9); we need not picture Noah spending 120 years traveling the earth to find every kind of animal and struggling to bring them back safely.

## THE FLOOD (7:11-24)

A straightforward reading of the account of Genesis 7 clearly gives an impression of a universal deluge. Inclusive language is used numerous times in the passage (note also the details given concerning the starting date of the Flood, the duration of the downpour and the length of time the waters covered the earth, and the height to which the flood waters rose). Furthermore, from the standpoint of biblical authority, we must at least understand it to be universal in terms of human life. It must be acknowledged, of course, that the Bible often uses universal language in a restricted sense that is not all-inclusive. For instance, when Augustus declared that "all the world" should be taxed, he really meant the entire Roman Empire. When men from the uttermost parts of the earth came to see the wisdom of Solomon, Sheba appears to be about as "uttermost" as it got. Even in theological terms, we recognize that "all" doesn't always mean "all" in a universal or all-inclusive sense.

Several aspects of the biblical account point to a universal understanding of the Flood, however. First of all, the comment that the mountain peaks were covered is physically impossible for a local flood. Not only that, but the final deposition of the Ark on Mount Ararat points in the same direction - a local flood would not deposit the Ark on the highest mountain in the region (noting that the correct reading is “the mountains of Ararat” (8:4) does not improve the picture significantly).

Secondly, the idea that the “fountains of the great deep” were broken up (7:11) conjures up a picture of something much more extensive than Mesopotamia - clearly this is talking about something more drastic than earthquakes in the floors of the Red and Mediterranean Seas.

Thirdly, the provisions made by God for the preservation of life would have been totally unnecessary in the case of a local flood. God could have simply told Noah to move, and the animals could have done the same (if God brought them to Noah, He also could have sent them to India or Africa). Especially with 120 years to prepare, moving would have been the obvious solution.

Fourthly, a local flood would have made God’s promise in Genesis 9 meaningless; even if the local flood to which some think these chapters refer were a real “whopper,” there certainly have been other bad floods in the history of mankind.

Lastly, the analogy made by Peter in II Peter 3:6 loses its significance if the flood in the days of Noah was not universal. There can certainly be no question that the destruction of the Last Days to which Peter compares the Flood will be universal in scope.

#### RECEDING WATERS, SACRIFICE, AND PROMISE (8:1-22)

God mercifully brings the Flood to an end and sends a strong wind to dry the surface of the earth. We then see the details of the process used by Noah to ascertain whether or not the earth was again inhabitable (the particulars involving the sending out of the birds survived in various pagan accounts, as we will see next week), along with careful chronological markers. The entire process from entering to leaving the Ark took a little over a year (7:11 cf. 8:14).

Noah then gives an offering of thanksgiving to God, sacrificing some of the clean animals and birds. God then promises never to destroy the earth by water again (though He will destroy it by fire - II Peter 3:7) and reiterates His guarantee of the days and seasons that constitute the agricultural cycle.

#### THE COVENANT WITH NOAH (9:1-17)

God then makes a covenant with Noah and his offspring. Note the following elements:

- The command to reproduce and fill the earth is reiterated (9:1,7).

- The dominion of man over beast is now expanded to include the use of the animals for food (9:2-3). Vegetarians clearly missed the boat on this one (sorry, *really* bad pun. . .).
- The prohibition of the eating of blood anticipates the dietary regulations of the Jewish law (9:4), as had the mention of clean and unclean animals in chapter 8.
- The sanctity of human life is clearly spelled out in 9:5-6. Animals may legitimately be killed, but people may not. The value of human life is so great that capital punishment is the just reward of one who takes it. Those who argue that verse 6 constitutes a statement of fact rather than a command (“don’t kill someone or it will initiate a blood feud”) ignore contexts both before and after - God is the one who demands an accounting, and the death of the murderer must occur because man is made in the image of God, not because he is sinful. No passage in Scripture argues more strongly for the justice of capital punishment for murder.
- The Noahic Covenant is established with Noah, his human offspring, and with all living creatures on the earth (this is the only biblical covenant thus described). God again promises never to destroy the earth by means of a flood, and gives a sign - the rainbow, which is intended as a reminder to Him of the promise He has made.

#### THE “CURSE OF HAM” (9:18-29)

The peculiar incident described at the end of the Flood narrative has two main purposes - to show that the curse of sin continued, even among the line of righteous Noah, and to justify the annihilation of the inhabitants of the Promised Land by the Israelites under Joshua.

We are told that Noah became a farmer, and that one day he became inebriated from the fruit of his vineyard (some have tried to excuse Noah’s indulgence by suggesting that the removal of the protective water canopy during the Flood caused grape juice to ferment faster, and that therefore Noah did not expect the result that he got from his afternoon’s refreshment). In any case, he was naked inside his tent when his son Ham “saw his father’s nakedness” and told his two brothers about it. Shem and Japheth then take a cloak and cover their father without looking at his shameful condition. When Noah awoke from his drunken stupor, he realized what had happened, then proceeded to curse the *son* of Ham, dooming him to perpetual slavery to the descendants of Shem and Japheth. We are then told that Noah lived to the ripe old age of 950, then died.

This strange passage raises all kinds of questions. As usual, commentators have had a field day trying to answer them, and though I will give what I consider to be the best of a weak lot, I do not pretend to have all of the answers to this one. Note the following:

- The first question that arises is, “What did Ham do that was so bad?” He seems to have been showing concern for his father’s condition, though he does nothing to remedy it. Several suggestions have been made here. One is that his fascination with nakedness parallels that of Adam and Eve after the Fall, as well as anticipating the open immorality of Canaanite



forms of worship. A more sinister explanation is that the Hebrew phrase “to uncover a person’s nakedness” is a euphemism for sexual intercourse (cf. Leviticus 18:7-8; 20:11). Ham was thus guilty of the homosexual rape of his father - surely a sufficient justification for the curse that followed (admittedly, this does not then explain the language of 9:23, which would support a more straightforward interpretation of the main verb).

- Why does Noah curse Canaan when Ham was the perpetrator of the outrage? Some have argued that the incident and its surrounding pronouncements were more detailed than the text indicates, but that Moses only included those aspects that would be of interest to the Israelites. Others have suggested that Canaan, alone among the sons of Ham, shared his perverse proclivities (the Canaanites practiced all sorts of sexual perversions, both homosexual and heterosexual, in their worship), and thus the curse on one son only was the path of justice rather than subjecting all of Ham’s sons to such a punishment.
- The curse then becomes the foundation for God’s order to exterminate the Canaanites when Israel enters the Promised Land. Note that the curse was fulfilled, not only by the destruction and enslavement of the Canaanites under Joshua, but also by the destruction of the Phoenician civilizations, first by Alexander the Great, and finally and forever by the Romans with the defeat and destruction of Carthage during the Punic Wars.
- The text thus gives no support whatsoever to the racist conclusions drawn from it in the past. Though most of Ham’s descendants did settle in Africa (10:8-14), the curse was on Canaan, not the sons of Cush, Mizraim, and Put - the inhabitants of Ethiopia, Egypt, and Libya, respectively. And the Canaanites, as noted above, were obliterated long before the advent of British imperialism or American slavery. In no way, shape, or form does the Bible justify race-based slavery as a consequence of God’s curse on black people.

Thus, with the sin and death of Noah, parallel in so many ways to the sin and death of Adam and Eve (working the soil, eating the fruit, nakedness, covering, curse, death), we find that the consequences of the Fall continue even after the cleansing of the earth by water and the extension of God’s mercy to its few remaining inhabitants. Two weeks from now, we will look at the other major incident described between the Fall and Abraham - the Tower of Babel - and see its consequences for the spread of the human race throughout the known world.



## **GENESIS 1-11, LESSON X**

### **The Flood - Scientific and Archaeological Issues (Genesis 6-9)**

Today we will look at some of the issues related to science and archaeology that stem from the biblical narrative of the Flood. We will find that these, too, point in the direction of the universal flood we discussed last week.

#### **THE FLOOD AND THE FOSSILS**

The reasoning used by evolutionists to interpret fossil evidence is essentially circular in nature, in addition to being highly synthetic (with evidence from widely separated sites being combined to form the “geologic table”). Evidence that contradicts the accepted interpretation is explained away as some sort of “inversion.”

We should note, however, that an explanation of fossils that depends on the Flood as a fossil-forming mechanism would on the whole anticipate findings very similar to those expected by evolutionists. For instance, in a flood of the kind described in Genesis, sea creatures would be buried first, followed by amphibians, who lived near the seas where the waters first began to rise. As the waters covered the land, the slow-moving reptiles would be the next to go, then the birds, who, though mobile, would quickly run out of food, lacking the stamina to fight the elements. The larger mammals would be able to flee to higher ground more effectively, and would be the last to be overtaken by the flood waters. Unlike the evolutionists, however, flood geologists would have no difficulty with finds that included fossil layers “out of order” - of which there are legion.

An important but often overlooked point is that the very existence of fossils points to a sudden catastrophe. Fish very rarely die a natural death, but when they do, they are quickly devoured by other sea creatures. Fossils of sea life could only occur as a result of a sudden catastrophe which either buried them under the water or else beached them and then buried them quickly. Similarly, land animals that die do not usually remain intact long enough to fossilize. Thus fossils support catastrophism by their very existence, especially in the large numbers in which they are to be found.

#### **EVIDENCE AGAINST A UNIVERSAL FLOOD**

A variety of evidence in addition to that provided by fossils is used by those who oppose the idea of a universal flood. For one thing, certain delicate volcanic formations have apparently existed undisturbed for millennia, but would certainly have shown the signs of the magnitude of flooding described in Scripture.

Another problem that is often raised has to do with the distribution of wildlife on the surface of the earth. Why, for instance, do kangaroos and other marsupials occur only in Australia, with no evidence of any migration having brought them there? How could they have gotten there in the first place? Of course, such questions can't be answered by evolutionists any more than they can be

answered by flood geologists. Evolutionists, too, would expect some evidence of migration from elsewhere.

Another problem of a biological nature has to do with the mixing of salt and fresh water that would clearly have to occur in a universal flood. How could fish, which depend so much on the saline content of the water in which they live in order to survive, outlive the kind of disruption that mixed salt and fresh water together for months at the least? The only response to this is that they didn't - at least not most of them. In the same way that most of the land animals perished, we should understand that most of the life in the seas did also.

Another question that always arises concerns the capacity of the Ark. Is it possible for samples of all living creatures to be preserved on a boat, even if it was twice the size of a football field? First of all, we should note that the Bible does not say that the animals who came to Noah (he didn't have to collect them) were *adults*. Young animals would have taken up less space, eaten less, and had a better chance of surviving the transition period after the Flood. Furthermore, if God could supernaturally gather the animals in order to preserve them, He could also theoretically place them in a state of suspended animation for the duration - a sort of universal hibernation, perhaps. Whitcomb and Morris have calculated the space necessary to hold however many "kinds" existed at the time, and found that the Ark was sufficient - even for some baby dinosaurs, though if they were around at the time, they clearly couldn't stand the altered conditions of the earth after the Flood.

## EVIDENCE FOR A UNIVERSAL FLOOD

Geologists have espoused uniformitarianism since the time of Lyell in the early part of the nineteenth century, but it has never been easy. The problem works in two different ways. In the first place, some types of geological formations could never have formed by processes observable today, even given the millions of years postulated by evolutionists. Such characteristics of the earth's crust as mountain ranges must have come into being as a result of catastrophic disruptions. Erosion and deposition simply could not have produced such phenomena unaided.

On the other side of the picture, certain phenomena which clearly resulted from natural processes such as erosion and deposition do not indicate an age anywhere near that postulated by geologists. Sedimentary deposits at the mouths of major rivers and the saline content of the seas would both indicate an age much less than that required by uniformitarians.

Human population is another factor that needs to be considered. The evidence of genetics points to a unified origin of the human race at a time no more than 150,000 years ago (the "Eve" theory). Scientists have noted that, within the span of history during which such things can be measured, human population has increased at such a rate as to double approximately every 150 years. Given that the rate has increased slightly as health conditions have improved, and noting that wars, plagues, and famines could adversely affect population growth, but also noting that growth should have been *faster* in the early years if the biblical data about lifespans and climatic conditions is to be taken seriously, working backwards from a current population of more than seven billion would

yield an approximation of 4500 years of human history, at least since the time of Noah. On the other hand, the typical evolutionary estimate of 2.6 million years of human history would require the human population to double at the ridiculous rate of once every 87,000 years (even the relatively conservative “Eve” theory would require a 5000-year rate)!

We should also take note of the canopy theory that is frequently associated with Flood geology. When the Bible speaks of the “windows of heaven” being opened, some believe it to refer to a canopy of water vapor high in the earth’s atmosphere that came down in the form of a six-week rainstorm. Biblical descriptions of conditions before the Flood (possibly no rain - Genesis 2:5; the great lifespans of the antediluvians) as well as after it (the rainbow, which could not have appeared without rain, is given as a sign after the Flood that God would never again destroy the earth by water; it would have been impossible with the water canopy gone anyway) are compatible with the canopy theory. There are problems here, of course - for one thing, the rotation of the earth would tend to gather a cloud of water vapor into a ring around the equator resembling the rings of Saturn rather than allowing it to remain uniformly distributed throughout the upper atmosphere.

Other evidence does point to a time in the past when conditions on earth were radically different, however. The existence of coal in Antarctica and well-preserved remains of woolly mammoths in Siberia (so well-preserved that they still have the remains of tropical grasses in their stomachs!) indicate that at one time the climate of the entire earth must have been subtropical. Furthermore, the water that makes up the polar icecaps could do a very nice job of flooding the earth, thank you, especially if the features of the earth’s crust were less pronounced than they are today.

Finally, we should note that some attempt to relate the continental drift theory to the Flood. The evidence indicates that the continents once fit together like a great jigsaw puzzle and broke apart some time in the distant past. Could the Flood, with its associated disruptions of the earth’s crust, have produced this phenomenon? It certainly would make the marsupials easier to explain!

## THE EPIC OF GILGAMESH AND OTHER MYTHS

Another piece of evidence that supports the idea of a universal flood is the existence of myths in many cultures all over the world concerning such a flood. These stories compare in many surprising details to the Genesis account, despite the fact that the overall picture presented in these legends is vastly inferior to the biblical narrative. What is important is that they exist at all - a consciousness of a universal flood in the distant past seems to permeate all cultures.

Scoffers, of course, will point to some of these accounts and argue that the Genesis story is simply a somewhat elevated version of the same pagan myth. The *Epic of Gilgamesh* is perhaps the best known of these flood stories. It came from ancient Mesopotamia, the land of Abraham’s forebears, and told of a universal flood survived by an ancient hero and his wife and family. Though similar to the Genesis account in many details - the number of people, the use of the raven and dove, the sacrifice after the flood, etc. - it differs in its picture of the gods. It contains a crass form of polytheism; not only are the gods fighting one another, but they are terrified of the flood over which

none of them seems to have control. Furthermore, when the flood ends, the gods swarm around the sacrifice “like flies” - the poor souls had not been fed for months! To see such a tale as the source of the Genesis account is ludicrous; it is far better to recognize in the Gilgamesh epic a corrupted form of the truth recorded accurately by divine inspiration in Scripture.

Similarly, the tales of peoples from China to Hawaii to Fiji to America to Australia speak of a great flood. While corruptions like those found in Gilgamesh are present in these as well, the existence of these myths in widely separated cultures argues for the universality of the event upon which they are based.

Thus we find that evidence from the worlds of science and archaeology points toward the veracity of the biblical narrative, despite what many skeptics would argue. External evidence thus supports the theological conclusions drawn by the writers of Scripture.

## GENESIS 1-11, LESSON XI

### The Tower of Babel and the Table of Nations (Genesis 10:1-11:9)

The section of Genesis before us today provides another link in the chain between Adam and Abraham, and again demonstrates the increasing depravity of the human race and the persistent grace of God in preparing a people for Himself.

#### THE DESCENDANTS OF THE SONS OF NOAH

In many ways, this list of the descendants of Noah could have been placed after the account of the Tower of Babel, since the story narrated at the beginning of Genesis 11 gives the reason for the geographical scattering described in Genesis 10. Several points should be noted about the list in general before addressing matters of particular interest singled out by Moses in writing the chapter.

- The list is not complete, but representative. In each section of the list, sons of some figures are given while sons of others are omitted. For instance, under the line of Japheth, sons of Gomer and Javan are given, but not the sons of the other sons of Japheth.
- While the list is not complete in terms of including all descendants, it is intended to be complete in the matter of geographical coverage. It reaches to the extremes of the then-known world, and is designed to include the entire human race of that day.
- The list demonstrates numerical factors that we have already seen elsewhere in the Genesis genealogies. The Table of Nations contains seventy names. It is no accident that this corresponds to the number of the family of Jacob that went down to Egypt (Genesis 46:27). The sinful, cursed race is to be redeemed through the New Humanity of the family of Abraham, through whom all nations of the earth will be blessed. The Table also contains a number of sevens (sons of Japheth, total of the sons of Gomer and Javan, total of the sons and grandsons of Cush), though this pattern is not maintained consistently throughout the genealogy.
- The list focuses on peoples of particular concern to Israel. Thus the descendants of Ham and Shem, whose peoples surrounded the Promised Land, are given far more attention than the remote tribes of Japheth.
- The list shows no concern with race, yet helps to explain the minor physiological differences that we associate with racial traits. After the separation of mankind following the Tower of Babel incident, inbreeding within isolated communities would have caused certain genetic traits to become dominant within the given population.

## THE JAPHETHITES (10:2-4)

The Japhethites are given little attention because of their remote location with respect to the Promised Land. They settled in the regions between and south of the Black and Caspian Seas and along the northern edge of the Mediterranean, from Asia Minor and the offshore islands (including Cyprus) through Armenia, the Caucasus, and Persia. These were seagoing peoples, as indicated by the mention of Tarshish (though it is doubtful that this refers to the later Phoenician colony on the coast of Spain). Note that these peoples, though they had little direct interaction with Israel, are mentioned in the apocalyptic battle described in Ezekiel 38-39.

## THE HAMITES (10:5-20)

The Hamites are given a great deal of attention because these peoples were deeply involved with the history of the Israelites. They settled in North Africa (Cush is Ethiopia, Put is Libya, Mizraim is Egypt), Crete (the Caphtorim), both sides of the Red Sea (Sheba, whose queen visited Solomon, is in modern-day Yemen), and of course Canaan. Note the following matters to which special attention is given:

- verses 8-9 - Nimrod is identified as the great empire-builder among the Hamites, yet his empire is located within Semite territory - Mesopotamia. Tradition identifies him as the builder of the Tower of Babel, but the text does not support this conclusion. Efforts to equate Nimrod with an otherwise-known ruler have largely failed, though a reasonable, albeit speculative, case can be made that he is Hammurabi, who ruled in the late third millennium BC and was of Amorite descent (see verse 16). Note that when the text calls him “a mighty hunter before the Lord,” this is not a compliment, but an indicator of proud self-sufficiency (many rulers in the ancient world were glorified in bas-reliefs picturing them as hunters).
- verse 10 - Here, with the mentions of Babylon and Shinar, we find the link to the Tower of Babel story.
- verses 13-14- Notice that special attention is given to the Philistines in the list associated with Egypt.
- verses 15-18- The list of the sons of Canaan should look familiar, including as it does the frequently-repeated names of the tribes conquered by Israel under Joshua.
- verse 19 - This group includes the cities of the plain that were destroyed in the judgment of Sodom and Gomorrah.



## THE SEMITES (10:21-31)

The Semites, of course, included the Israelites. Here Moses continues to follow the pattern of treating the son who is to receive the most attention last. The Semites settled in Syria, Mesopotamia and the Arabian peninsula. The Israelites were also known as “Hebrews” because of their descent from Eber (verses 24-25). Note the following:

- verse 25 - Many suggestions have been made to explain the event described in this verse. When we are told that in the time of Peleg “the earth was divided,” does it mean that mankind broke up into opposing empires, that settled and nomadic peoples separated from one another, or even that continental drift following the upheaval of the Flood caused the great land mass of earth to separate? The most likely explanation is that the incident described in the next chapter, which involved the dividing of the *peoples* of the earth, occurred during the lifespan of this generation.
- verses 28-29- If one compares the names here with those in verse 7, one finds several duplications. These may indicate intermarriage, that the names given refer more to geographical regions than to physical descent, or simply that these names were popular at the time.

## THE TOWER OF BABEL (11:1-9)

The story of the Tower of Babel is the second great narrative that interrupts the flow of the genealogies connecting Adam to Abraham. It demonstrates the extent of man’s wickedness and again shows the extent of God’s mercy. Note the following:

- verse 1 - The story explains the diversity of tongues among the human race. At this point after the Flood, humanity spoke only one language.
- verse 2 - In the book of Genesis, moving eastward is never a good thing. Adam and Eve travel eastward after leaving Eden (3:24), Cain travels eastward when he is driven from God’s presence (4:16), and later Lot chooses to go eastward, out of the Promised Land, when given the choice of regions by Abraham (13:11). The plain of Shinar is in southern Mesopotamia.
- verse 3 - The region and the kind of construction described both fit the late fourth millennium BC.
- verse 4 - What is described here is a ziggurat, a step pyramid intended to facilitate visits of the gods to earth. The top was a sanctuary for the gods, and often contained an astrological temple. Thus the point was not to build a tower to reach the heavens, but one that would allow the gods to come down. Height was only an issue if the builders built one of these too high, under which circumstance the gods might object to the idea of man intruding into their territory.

Note, too, that another stated purpose is “to make a name for ourselves.” Babylon (linguistically identified with Babel) thus represents both idolatry and *hubris*. Of course, while man is trying to make a name for himself, God is planning to make a name for the man He has chosen (Genesis 12:2).

- verses 5-7 - God comes down, all right, but He is not pleased with what He sees. In language that is parallel to the account of the Fall in Genesis 3, God notes that, if man accomplishes what he sets out to do, it will be ruinous for him. God therefore in mercy prevents him from realizing his humanistic dreams.
- verses 8-9 - God scatters them over the face of the earth, thus explaining the geographical distributions described in chapter ten. Furthermore, the text gives us the story behind the naming of the city of Babylon.

God’s mercy is seen in this passage not only in the confusion of tongues to prevent man from following the promptings of his overweening pride, not only in the perpetuation of the line of promise through the figure of Abraham, the chosen one who receives God’s covenant, but also in the ultimate reversal of the curse of Babel. That is found on the day of Pentecost, where God enables people speaking a wide variety of languages (note that some even correspond to those mentioned in Genesis 10) to hear the Gospel in their own tongues. What God’s judgment has divided, His mercy brings together, so that in Christ such divisions no longer exist.

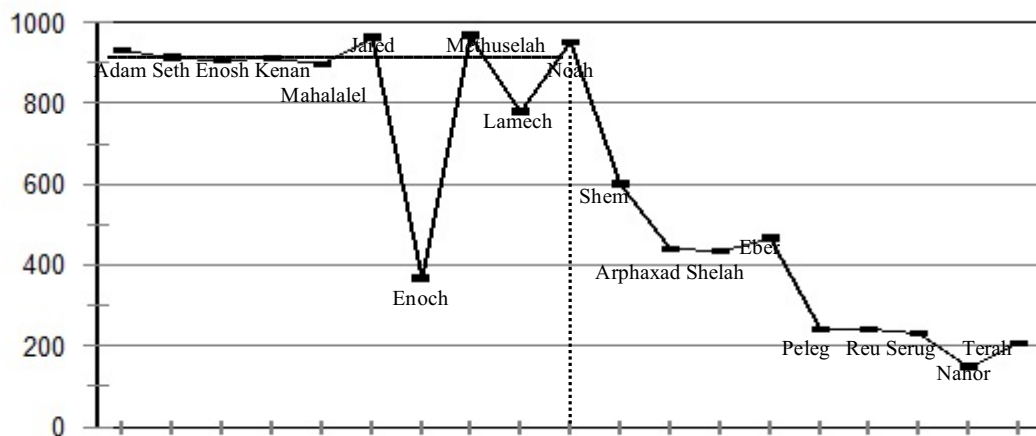
## GENESIS 1-11, LESSON XII

### The Ancestors of Abraham and God's Covenant (Genesis 11:10-32)

Today we conclude our study of the early portion of the book of Genesis. We will look at the connective tissue that takes us from Noah to Abram, and also summarize the key ideas that we have seen in our discussions together.

#### THE GENEALOGY FROM NOAH TO ABRAHAM (11:10-26)

After listing the Table of Nations and giving the reason why the nations were scattered in the way described, Moses now turns to the connecting links between Noah and Abram. The genealogy is similar to the one in Genesis five in that it contains ten names (if Noah is included at the beginning) with the last name having three sons, and follows the line of promise. Unlike the genealogy in Genesis 5, this one does not add up the ages of the patriarchs for us. It also includes no comments on specific figures until we arrive at Terah, the father of Abram. The most notable aspect of the genealogy is the marked decrease in lifespans it records. If one were to chart the genealogies found in Genesis 5 and 11, one would arrive at the following graph:



Note that, with the exception of Enoch, the antediluvian patriarchs tended to live somewhat over 900 years, while after the Flood, lifespans dropped within ten generations to a range much more familiar to us, until by the time that Moses wrote Psalm 90, the expected lifespan was about 70 years (Psalm 90:10). The pattern after the Flood looks very much like an exponential decay curve, and some believe it may be explained by the increase in cosmic radiation that penetrated the earth's atmosphere after the collapse of the protective water canopy during the Flood. Others see in the decrease in lifespan an indication of the growing consequences of man's sin, as the decay imparted to his body by the Fall continues to worsen as time passes (and continues to do so, in fact, until the advent of modern medicine turned the tide in recent centuries). In any case, as we saw before, the blessing of fruitfulness continues, and along with it the curse of death. We now arrive at the point toward which Moses has been moving all along - the Abram narrative.

## INTRODUCING THE CAST AND SETTING THE STAGE (11:27-32)

Virtually all the characters introduced in the closing verses of Genesis 11 play a role in the narrative that follows. Haran is the father of Lot, who is entrusted to the care of Abram after the death of his father. Nahor is the grandfather of Laban and Rebekah and the great-grandfather of Leah and Rachel. At this time, marriage of near relatives was not considered a problem, since Abram married his half-sister Sarai (Genesis 20:12) and Nahor married his niece.

Two points of theological significance appear in this passage. The first is geographical - the journey of the clan from Ur of the Chaldeans (probably located in northern Mesopotamia rather than at the famous Sumerian site in the south) toward Canaan, which is sidetracked at Haran until the death of Terah. Genesis 12 explains the reason for the journey - the call of Abram by a God with whom he had not previously been acquainted. The reason for the delay is never explained, though one might surmise that Terah, as the head of the clan, did not wish to continue, and Abram could not do so until the death of his father, at which time he resumed the journey that God had instructed him to undertake.

The second point of theological significance is the barrenness of Sarai. A frequently repeated pattern in Genesis will demonstrate God's sovereignty in fulfilling His covenant with man. We will see this not only in His universal choice of the younger son over the elder one (Isaac over Ishmael, Jacob over Esau, Joseph and then Judah over Reuben), but also in His providing the promised seed through women deemed to be barren (besides Sarai, we also see Rebekah in Genesis 25:21 and Rachel in Genesis 30:1).

## FRUITFULNESS AND DOMINION

At the beginning of our study, we saw that God created man to fulfill two essential functions - "be fruitful and increase in number; fill the earth and subdue it" (Genesis 1:28). We have seen that these basic functions have continued to be carried out despite man's sin, though both are corrupted, whether by the polygamy of Lamech (Genesis 4:19) and the abominations of the "sons of God" (Genesis 6:4) or the prideful "dominion" exercised by the civilization at Babel.

## BLESSING AND CURSING

From the time of the Fall, God has demonstrated His mercy along with the judgment He poured out on sinful man. He provided coverings of animal skins for Adam and Eve to protect them from the harsh world that had been cursed for their sake; He cast the first couple out of the Garden of Eden and guarded the way to the Tree of Life with an angel armed with a flaming sword so that they would not be confirmed forever in the wickedness into which they had fallen; He spared Cain after his repentance and allowed him to found a productive civilization; He protected Noah from the Flood in order to perpetuate the human race despite its horrific wickedness; and He maintained a continuous line to bear the promise given to Adam and Eve, even after the debacle at Babel, as

indicated by the genealogy in Genesis 11. Death may have continued from Adam to Moses, but so did persistent indicators of God's mercy.

## THE CONTINUITY OF THE PROMISE

In Genesis 3:15, God had promised Adam and Eve that He would provide a seed who would crush the head of the serpent. As we have noted previously, Genesis 5-11 could be viewed as one long genealogy interrupted by several narrative interludes, the purpose of which is to demonstrate that God was faithful to His promise - that the line that bore that promise continued straight through from Adam to Abram, despite the wickedness of man portrayed in the accounts of Cain and Abel, the Flood, and the Tower of Babel. Abram and his descendants were to become the bearers of that promise until the Seed finally arrived in the person of Jesus Christ. He is the one who not only crushed the head of Satan, defeating him on the cross and by means of the empty tomb, but also fulfilled the covenant with Noah in bringing God's blessing upon the entire cursed cosmos and fulfilled the covenant with Abram by being the one through whom all the nations of the earth were to be blessed. Thus Genesis 1-11 serves not only as a fitting prologue to the book of Genesis and an introduction to the entire Pentateuch, but also as the passage that sets the stage for the Bible as a whole, introducing the curse for which a remedy is needed that man cannot provide and speaking of the blessing and the promise through which that remedy would be provided by God Himself in His Son, Jesus Christ.