

LESSON 3

CONTINUED DEGENERATION AND JUDGEMENT

Genesis 5:1–11:9

Aim

To understand that sinful man is incapable of delivering himself and must look to a merciful, redeeming God for reconciliation.

Generations of Adam

Genesis 5:1-32

The genealogies of Genesis 5 are important to history but are of little theological and homiletical value today. With the exception of the statement in Genesis 5:22, "Enoch walked with God," few sermons have been based on chapter 5. The genealogies do serve the purpose of connecting Adam with Noah and showing that all mankind is involved in sin as a result of Adam's sin.

A comparison of the genealogy of Cain's descendants in 4:17-18 with the Seth genealogy in 5:1-32 indicates that the two genealogies are parallel forms of the same tradition about the descendants of the first man.¹ Because of Cain's sin, emphasis is placed on Seth as the ancestor of God's people. Cain went his own way and established a society, but without God violence and death lay ready to break out. At Seth's birth, his mother said, "God has appointed." With Seth began the recognition of man's dependence upon God and the establishment of that line which led through Noah and to the call of Abraham. The picture of man's degeneration was not yet complete, however, and the narrative continued to prepare for the judgement of the Flood.

Seth's genealogy has ten names instead of the eight of Cain's genealogy in chapter 4. With the exception of Enoch, the individuals in that list had extraordinary duration of life. Each one is said to have lived almost a thousand years. Ten kings who reigned before the Flood are named in a Sumerian king list from Larsa. The length of their reigns ranged from ten thousand to sixty thousand years. The list ends with the words, "After the flood kingship was sent down from on high." The statement apparently indicates that a new beginning was made after the Flood. The last name in the second Larsa list is Ziusudra (Utnapishtim), the hero of the Babylonian story of the Flood in the Gilgamesh Epic. The seventh king in the Sumerian list possessed special wisdom in matters pertaining to the gods. The seventh name in the Genesis genealogy is Enoch who "walked with God." He was taken to heaven without dying.

The longevity of the antediluvians (those who lived before the Flood) has created problems for many. Suggested solutions to the problem are:

¹ For a fuller discussion of these parallels, see *Peake's Commentary on the Bible* (rev. ed.; London: Thomas Nelson and Sons Ltd., 1962), p. 182.

The genealogies of chapter 5 of Genesis connect _____ and _____.

(Adam, Noah)

Emphasis is placed on _____ as the ancestor of God's people.

(Seth)

1. Men lived long lives because they were physically perfect. Only after the Flood did physical deterioration set in. Archaeological discoveries do not support this theory: few ancient men passed the age of fifty.
2. Some have considered the names as those of dynasties, families, or tribes instead of individuals. The names stood for groups spanning several generations rather than individuals.
3. The explanation has been given that a year actually meant a month. This theory is weakened by the fact that Methuselah would have been only five years of age when he had a son.
4. The author may have been following the practice of his day of simply exaggerating the ages in order to show the glory of his ancestors.

However the longevity of Noah's ancestors might be understood, it does serve the purpose of contrasting ancient and later men in whom sin had brought about degeneration. The Sumerian tradition lists ten kings who ruled 241,000 years before the Flood. After the Flood, twenty-three ruled 24,510 years—a sharp decrease!

The Flood

Genesis 6:1—9:29

Stories of a great flood are found among various ethnic groups in India, the islands of the Pacific, the Indian tribes of North and South America, and many other countries of the world. The most ancient account is found among the people of the Mesopotamian Valley. The Gilgamesh Epic has been mentioned previously. Utnapishtim was advised by Ea, the lord of wisdom, to escape the flood that was to destroy his city. He was instructed to build a ship in which he, his household, and his cattle would be saved. He was spared the destruction of the ravaging waters. Like Noah, he sent out several birds to find out how far the waters had receded. The ship finally came to rest on the summit of a mountain, and Utnapishtim offered a sacrifice to the gods. He and his wife were left with immortality.

The biblical student should not be distressed by the fact that common stories are in the traditions of both the Hebrew and Mesopotamian cultures. Abraham was born in Ur of the Chaldeans in Mesopotamia. The early accounts of the Flood date back to the beginning of the third millennium, at least fifteen hundred years before Genesis was written according to the traditional date. The stories of the Flood in different cultures would vary because they were transmitted orally and for different purposes. The author of Genesis used the oral tradition of an early historical event for theological purposes. He was not simply reporting history but was writing about divine judgement and grace. He was interested in showing that the only hope for sinful man is God's plan of redemption revealed through Abraham and his descendants.

The "sons of God" and "daughters of men" (6:1-4)

This passage is very difficult to explain. The original purpose seems to have been to explain the existence of a gigantic race and to emphasize the increase of violence and corruption on the earth in the days before the Flood.

"Sons of God" has been interpreted in several ways. (1) The sons of God may have been young men of royal or noble birth who married the daughters of men, who were beautiful though sinful women, perhaps from Cain's line. (2) Elohim is a generic word (relating to a genus or type) which may be more descriptive for the being of God than the proper name God. The king was

With the exception of Enoch, what was the approximate life span of the ancestors of Noah? _____

(1000 years)

Although there are various suppositions concerning the long life of those who lived before the Flood, there remains the contrast between ancient and later men in whom _____ had brought about _____.

(sin, degeneration)

The most ancient account of a great flood is found among the people of the _____.

(Mesopotamian Valley)

Similarities between the Babylonian and Hebrew flood stories are:

1. _____
2. _____
3. _____

(Compare your answers with the text.)

In transmitting the flood account, the author of Genesis was concerned with God's _____ and _____.

(judgement, grace)

called son of God by virtue of his office. Angels were called sons of God by virtue of their nature: they were "Elohim beings". Their nature was related to their function of being sent on a mission by Elohim. According to this view, the sons of Elohim were beings of the heavenly court who married the daughters of men.

God's decision to destroy man (6:5-8)

Even though the identity of the sons of God is obscure, the purpose for including the story is obvious. Although gigantic men (v. 4) were inhabiting the earth, the wickedness of men was increasing (v. 5). Genesis 6:1-5 prepares for the judgement expressed in verse 7. In the midst of condemnation, however, there was a ray of hope. One man was righteous and found favour in the eyes of the Lord (vv. 8ff.). The author of Genesis continued the theme of redemption by focusing attention on Noah and his descendants. All of the earth was corrupt and deserved destruction, but God would carry out His redemptive work through Noah and his family. Not even all of the descendants of Seth would be redeemed because of their corruption. The Lord "repented" (was moved with great emotion or concern) that He "had made man upon the earth." The Lord was not sorry that He had made man, but He was grieved that man had behaved in such a manner. The expression is one of concern and compassion for man.

God's covenant with Noah (6:9-22)

Genesis 6:9 states that "Noah was a righteous man, the one blameless man of his time" (NEB). This does not mean that Noah was perfect. The meaning is that Noah was mature, loyal, and complete in his allegiance to God. He, like Enoch, walked with God.

God established His covenant with Noah (v. 18). A covenant is an agreement between two parties in which each assumes responsibility. God would deliver Noah and his family from destruction in the Flood, and Noah was to obey the commandments of God (v. 22). Noah was instructed to build an ark or boat of gopher wood, 450 feet long, 75 feet wide, and 45 feet high. It was to be three stories high and divided into rooms with a door and window at the top. Noah, his wife, his three sons, the sons' wives, and a pair of every living creature were to be housed in the ark. The subject of the covenant is discussed more fully in chapter 9.

The flood (7:1-8:14)

In 7:1-5 there are fuller instructions which were given to Noah concerning preservation from the flood waters. Critical scholars believe that 7:2 is from a different source than 6:19 because the instruction in 7:2 to bring seven pair of animals into the ark differs from the instruction to bring two of every kind in 6:19. Conservative scholars explain that the account in chapter 7 is different because it includes animals which were used for food.

Critical scholars point out that the flood account in 7:4 speaks of a forty-day rain, whereas the second in 7:24 (cf. 8:3) speaks of a rain which lasted 150 days. Conservative scholars explain the differences by pointing out that the latter reference does not state that it actually rained for 150 days.

The flood account shows that the order established at creation broke down into ruin. Just as Adam's sin in the Garden of Eden disrupted the natural harmony of creation, man's wickedness in the days of Noah caused the foundations of the great deep to break up. The consequences of the rejection of God's rule are disorder and destruction. The purposes of God were not defeated, however, since there was one man and one family on whom He would bestow His blessings. A new beginning would be made through Noah and his family.

Genesis 6:1-8 shows that even though _____ men were inhabiting the earth, the _____ of man was increasing.

(gigantic, wickedness)

The author's theme of redemption is continued by his focus of attention upon _____ and his descendants.

(Noah)

An agreement between God and Noah was referred to in Genesis 6:18 as a _____.

(covenant)

The responsibilities of each in the covenant were:

God - _____

Noah - _____

(Read Genesis 6:18-22 and also compare your answer with the text.)

List the difference found in Genesis 6:19 and 7:2.

Give the opinion of critical scholars.

How do conservative scholars explain the difference in the number of animals? _____

(Compare your answer with the text.)

The covenant and its sign (8:15–9:17)

According to 8:20, Noah built an altar to the Lord and offered sacrifices of clean animals. The Lord responded to the act of worship by vowing never again to destroy the earth because of man's sin. Genesis 8:21 reveals that the act of worship did not mean that the punishment of the Flood caused any basic change in man. The intent of man's heart is evil, and the descendants of Noah were expected to be no better than their predecessors. However, God determined to deal with sinful man in a different manner.

God's covenant with Noah is explained more fully in 9:1-17. The creation blessing given to man in Genesis 1:28 was again repeated to the single family that was to replenish the whole earth. The relation of man to animal creation was stated again. The animal kingdom originally was to be subject to man, but would come to dread him. The covenant extended the use of animals to include meat for food with the condition that flesh containing blood (life) should not be eaten. The original existing harmony was broken as man killed animals for food and as animals in turn killed man. Another stipulation of the covenant was that man should avenge murder. Because man was made in the image of God, a murderer should be put to death (9:6).

The statement of the covenant between God and the whole earth is found in 9:9-17. It was a covenant of pure grace, universal and eternal. It included natural order as well as living creatures. God promised never again to cut off life from the earth by a flood. Positively, the covenant meant that God would forever sustain and protect human life. Verse 16 states that it was to be an everlasting covenant. God made the rainbow in the clouds the sign of His covenant—of His faithfulness to keep it.

The curse upon Canaan (9:18–29)

The evaluation that man's heart is wicked as stated in 8:21 is reaffirmed in these verses. Noah perverted his blessing from God and turned the fruit of the soil into a curse. He began agriculture and started a new venture in civilization—the cultivation of the vine. In his drunkenness, Noah disgraced himself, and his son Ham discovered him in his shameful condition. Instead of respectfully covering the nakedness of his father, he deemed the incident an occasion for laughter and mockingly repeated the incident to his brothers. As a result of this incident, Canaan, Ham's descendant, would be degraded to the lowest position of servitude among his brethren. Shem would rule over Canaan and, along with Japheth, would receive a blessing. It should be stressed that the curse was upon Canaan and not Ham. There is no way by which Africans can be identified with the descendants of Canaan.

The Universality of Judgement

Genesis 10:1–11:9

The Table of Nations in chapter 10, following the covenant with Noah, emphasizes that God's covenant and judgement include all men. Yahweh is the God of all the earth. The principle of election is made clear, for Israel was selected from the many nations of the earth. The author of Genesis showed that God intended to bless not only Israel but all nations of the earth. The antiquity of chapter 10 is indicated by its inclusion of early historical notations and its description of world culture of that period. The author used an ancient document to show God's redemptive purpose and plan in history.

In 11:1-9 the author showed the futility and emptiness of human efforts and the judgement of God against those who try to exalt themselves above Him. The dispersion of the human race is

Upon leaving the ark, Noah built an _____
(altar).

Which verse in Genesis 8 indicates that the punishment of the Flood did not cause any basic change in man's sinful nature? (Write the verse as well as the reference.) _____

God's covenant with the whole earth described in Genesis 9:9-17 is of pure g_____,
u _____, and e _____.
(grace, universal, eternal)

Read carefully Genesis 9:18-29.

Was Canaan only or also his father, Ham, degraded to the lowest position of servitude? _____

(Canaan only)

to be interpreted theologically. The writer of Genesis interpreted the building of the Tower of Babel as a symbol of man's pride and defiance of God (11:4). Although the building is not identified in the Bible as a Babylonian ziggurat, its construction took place in the land of Shinar and leaves little doubt that it was one of the ziggurats which served as temples for the deities in Mesopotamia. The massive tower became a symbol of the ruthless power and oppression of the empires that existed in that region.

The building which man considered to be so tall that it would touch the sky was actually so small that the Lord had to come down to see it (v. 5). The Tower of Babel was a proud attempt on the part of man to create unity and strength, but under the judgement of God it became a place of confusion, resulting in the scattering of the people over the face of the earth. The story of Babel was reversed on the day of Pentecost with the outpouring of the Holy Spirit. Men from every nation heard of the mighty works of God in their own language (Acts 2:5-7).

The building of the ziggurat expressed the sinful attitude of the people in a second way. With a tall look-out and rallying place for defence, giving a feeling of security to the people, it would have been used as a fortress. With their own adequate fortification, their need for God would have been minimized. Their concern was to make their own name great instead of magnifying the name of God and giving glory to Him.

Theological Concepts

The universality of God

Critical scholars have asserted that Genesis and Exodus do not teach monotheism (worship of one God). One of their arguments is based on the First Commandment which prohibited the Israelites from worshipping other gods but did not deny the existence of other gods (Exod. 20:3). Although there may be no direct proof that the author of Genesis and Exodus was a monotheist, indirect evidence begins with the first chapter of Genesis and is based on the doctrine of creation.

Anyone who believes that one God created the heavens and the earth and agrees with Genesis that this God requires man's obedience in worship is not going to be polytheistic. To conclude that God, who created man for fellowship with Himself, created other gods who might win man's allegiance is not the mark of a primitive mind but of irrationality.

The doctrine of creation logically implies that the Creator is God of all men, and men of every nation are required to worship Him. The author of Genesis sets forth this fact by tracing all nations to the one man Adam whom God created. Even though God chose one nation through whom to make Himself known, there is no indication that Yahweh was to be the God of only the Israelites. He is the God of all men. The Old and New Testaments are not books originated by and belonging to the Jewish people but rather God's revelation given to one nation for all nations. The genealogies of Genesis 5-10 point to the common relation of all nations and to the universality of the Creator.

The neglect of the Bible by contemporary societies is manifested by an exaggerated emphasis on nationalism. The doctrine of creation by one God and mankind's descending from Adam and Eve emphasize the relation of all nations. With modern communications and travel turning the world into a neighbourhood, there is need for men to relate to one another as brothers rather than competitors. Acceptance of the doctrine of one God who created all men and to whom all men are responsible leads to brotherhood. Emphasis on national traditions, religions, and interests perpetuates the confusion introduced at the Tower of Babel.

Genesis 11:4 describes the Tower of Babel as a symbol of man's _____ and defiance of _____.
(pride, God)

The Tower of Babel was an attempt by man to create _____ and _____.
(unity, strength)

What theological truth is implied in the doctrine of creation?

(That the Creator is God of all mankind.)

In contemporary societies, the confusion introduced at the Tower of Babel is perpetuated by emphasis on _____
(nationalism)

God's covenant with man

The relation of the Creator to His creatures is described as a covenant. A covenant relationship is consistent with the natures of both God and man. This relationship is not depicted as that of master and slave in which the slave has no freedom or rights and serves only the interests of his master. Since God is love, His nature is to help man rather than to use him for selfish purposes. In the covenant relationship, God promises to bless man. These blessings which God assumes as His covenant responsibility were promised to Noah after he built an altar and worshipped the Lord. Man's part in the covenant relationship is to obey and to worship his Creator. The responsibility assumed by the Lord, who has all power, is to refrain from destroying sinful man and to provide for him and to protect him. Man's sinful nature causes him to demand that God uphold His promises while he ignores his responsibility to God.

The nature of God

Creation has revealed that God is all-powerful and the only self-existing being. The account of the Flood reveals that He is righteous and requires justice on the part of His creatures. The Flood was a sentence of punishment upon wicked men. The preservation of one family to whom God would relate and through whom the world would be replenished manifests God's sovereignty. The dealings of God with Noah and his sons after the Flood and the establishment of the covenant relationship reveal that God is merciful and loving. In spite of Noah's sin, God did not reject and punish him.

In the covenant relationship—

God's responsibility is _____

Man's responsibility is _____

(God—to refrain from destroying sinful man and to
provide for and protect him

Man—to obey and worship his Creator)

God's covenant with sinful man reveals that He is _____ and _____

(merciful, loving)

Home Study Exercise

Basic activity (Levels 1, 2, and 3). After reading Genesis 5–11 and the study manual, do the following exercise.

1. For what purpose did the writer of Genesis use the genealogies of chapters 5 and 6? _____

2. How would you explain the longevity of the people before the Flood? _____

3. Name three similarities of the Babylonian and Hebrew flood stories.
 - (1) _____
 - (2) _____
 - (3) _____
4. Why did the author of Genesis include the story concerning the “sons of God” and the “daughters of men”?

5. What is a covenant? _____

6. Give two “discrepancies” and their scripture references which critical scholars use to argue that two flood accounts have been woven together in Genesis 6, 7, and 8. _____

7. What evidence is there that punishment by the Flood caused no basic change in man’s sinful condition?

8. Describe the covenant God made with all the earth. _____

9. How extensive was the curse upon Canaan? _____

10. What two sinful attitudes of man were revealed in the experience of the Tower of Babel? _____

11. What was the Tower of Babel? _____
12. What does the universality of God imply concerning all nations? _____

13. What does God’s covenant relationship to sinful man reveal about the nature of God? _____

Supplementary activity (Levels 2 and 3). Read pages 28–35 in *A Nation in the Making* and do the following.

1. What is the meaning of the curse placed on Canaan?
2. Point out the differences between the biblical flood story and the Babylonian flood story.

Advanced activity (Level 3). Read pages 38–51 in *The Book of Genesis* by Fritsch and do the following.

1. According to Fritsch, why did the author of Genesis use so many genealogies?
 2. Name the apparent similarities between the list of antediluvian patriarchs in Genesis and the ten kings who ruled in Babylon before the Flood.
 3. Discuss the nature of the covenant with Noah.
 4. Give Fritsch's view of the curse upon Canaan.
 5. Write an essay entitled, "Contrasts between Babel and Pentecost."
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Seminar Discussion

1. What is the relation of the Babylonian flood stories, the king lists, and the ziggurats to the biblical writings? Do their existences deny the divine inspiration of the Bible?
2. Do you believe the genealogies of this section of Scripture are the inspired Word of God? If they are the inspired Word of God, what is their message to our generation?
3. What is the message of God's covenant with Noah for our age?
4. What do chapters 5–11 reveal concerning the nature of man?
5. What do the Flood and God's covenant with Noah reveal about the nature of God?
6. How do Genesis 1–11 conflict with the contemporary emphasis on nationalism?