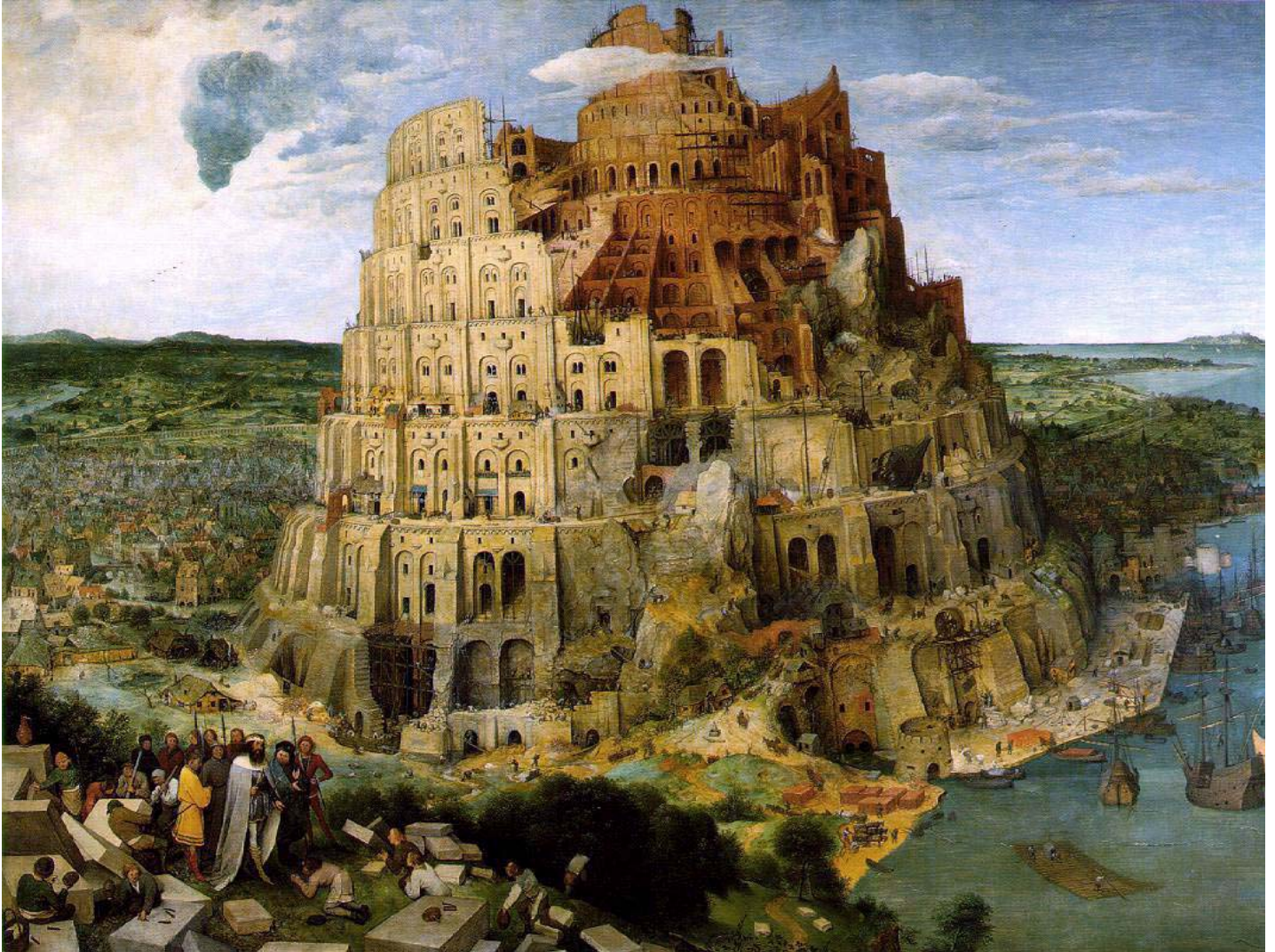


THE BIG JOURNEY

from Creation to New Creation



'The Tower of Babel' by Pieter Bruegel the Elder (circa 1525-1569) (Kunsthistorisches Museum, Vienna).

five ► Cataclysm and Covenant

East of Eden

Adam and Eve are now in exile. They've been expelled from God's paradise. God stationed cherubim and a fiery sword east of the Garden to stop anyone getting back in. The fiery sword reminds us of the pillar of cloud and fire that escorted His people in the wilderness (Exodus 13.21-22, 40.38, Nehemiah 9.12). That pillar was a visible display of God's presence. Perhaps this sword was, too.

Satan's ambition

Satan was now *"the ruler of this world"* (see John 12.31, 14.30). His kingdom was once confined to a heavenly

realm. Now it had a bridgehead on earth.

Mankind was under Satan's power. What did Satan want to do with that power? Satan is a proud and arrogant angel (see 1 Timothy 3.6 NKJV). There can be no doubt that he wants to be like God Himself. That is very probably confirmed by something Isaiah prophesied. In Isaiah 14 we read: *"You said in your heart, 'I will ascend to heaven; above the stars of God I will set my throne on high; . . . I will make myself like the Most High.'* Isaiah is prophesying this against the King of Babylon. But it's very likely to have a double reference to Satan as well.

Satan had failed to achieve his ambition in heaven. He couldn't be like God there. But now he saw a chance to be like God here on Earth. And that included taking God's plans for Earth and trying to get them accomplished himself.

What *were* God's plans? We saw in session 2 that God called mankind to complete His 'world project'. We were to be *culture-builders*. God commissioned us to colonise this planet, subdue it and make it a paradise where He lived among us (compare Revelation 21.3).

So Satan began to inspire mankind to complete God's 'world project' – without God. In W. Ian Thomas's words (quoted in session 4), Adam and Eve had "... believed the Devil's lie, . . . that man can somehow be man without God, that the Creator is not indispensable to the creature, that we can carve our own destiny, be king in our own kingdom, be our own god. . . . Through Satan's lying subtlety, mankind embarked upon the mad experiment of disobedience and human self-sufficiency, . . ."

Satan's dreamed of a godless 'utopia' - an ideological, political and economic system united in rebellion against God. The writer H. G. Wells (1866–1946) captured this

humanistic vision in his book *A Short History of the World*. In a chapter entitled *The Political and Social Reconstruction of the World*, he wrote this: "Can we doubt that presently our race will more than realize our boldest imaginations, that it will achieve unity and peace, that it will live, . . . in a world made more splendid and lovely than any palace or garden that we know, going on from strength to strength in an ever widening circle of adventure and achievement?" Wells penned this in the early 1920s. The most terrible war that history had yet recorded was still a fresh and grievous memory. It took the Spanish civil war and the approach of World War II to bring him to reality.

God's response

How would God respond to all this? He allowed that "mad experiment of disobedience and human self-sufficiency" to continue. Satan's plan needed to be tested and proved. The great question was this: "Can fallen mankind, governed by Satan, really bring paradise to this world without God?" God will not wind up history before this question is fully answered.

The dawn of history

Cain and Abel

Eve gives birth to two boys - Cain, the firstborn, and Abel (Genesis 4.1-2). Abel is a prophet (see Luke 11.49-51), a righteous man in fellowship with God.

The two brothers each offer a sacrifice to God. But "*the Lord had regard for Abel and his offering, but for Cain and his offering he had no regard*" (Genesis 4.4-5). God didn't approve of Cain's sacrifice. This isn't, it seems, because Cain's sacrifice is bloodless. The text doesn't imply this. It's because Abel offers his in faith (Hebrews 11.4). Abel's heart is right with God. He brings God the very best he can - the firstborn, and the fat. The fat was the choicest part of the animal. Later, under the Law of Moses, it was specifically designated as God's portion (see Leviticus 3.16).

In contrast, Cain just brings "*an offering*". There's no indication that his offering is the best of the crop. His heart isn't right with God. That will shortly be demonstrated beyond doubt by his murder of Abel. And we see it in his truculent rejoinder to God - "*How should I know - am I supposed to be my brother's keeper?*" (Genesis 4.9, author's paraphrase). God won't accept sacrifices from people whose heart isn't right with Him (see, for example, Isaiah 1.10-17).

Cain is angry. But see how graciously God deals with him. He says: "*Why are you angry, and why has your face fallen? If you do well, will you not be accepted? And if you do not do well, sin is crouching at the door. Its desire is for you, but you must rule over it.*" God wants to turn Cain's heart away from anger. He wants to bring him back to Himself.

But, despite God's entreaty, Cain's anger explodes. He murders his brother. Abel's body lies lifeless, the first dead human body. The devil, "*a murderer from the beginning . . .*" (John 8.44), has sown the spirit of murder into Cain's heart. Playwright Arthur Miller commented "If a brother could murder a brother, nobody is safe . . ."



'The Murder of Abel' by Tintoretto (1518–1594)
(Gallerie dell'Accademia, Venice).

There is no capital punishment in those days. God doesn't institute that till after the flood (see Genesis 9.6). Instead, He places Cain under a curse. Cain would now find it difficult to scratch a living from the soil. This is a step beyond God's judgment on Adam. Adam and his descendants would still be able to live from the land's produce – though that living was to be won through hard labour (Genesis 3.17-19). But now Cain would find it difficult to support himself. The land would yield little to him.



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Ruins of the lower city of Arad (occupied in the early Bronze Age, around 3150-2200 BC) in what is now Israel – it was a tightly packed mass of buildings surrounded by a wall. Though this is far later than Cain's time, it is still very ancient and perhaps not dissimilar from the kind of city that Cain founded. It shows an ancient Middle Eastern city to be a tight-knit and fortified community.

Cursing and blessing

What does it mean to be blessed? Bernard Bell explains: "By blessing something God endows it with fruitfulness to successfully fulfill the purposes for which he created it."

A curse is the opposite of blessing. Bernard Bell explains that 'to curse' means: ". . . to deprive of fruitful life. . . . When God curses something he frustrates it, rendering it futile."

A cursed life is a pointless, meaningless life. It is a life that ultimately counts for nothing. To worldly eyes, perhaps, Cain achieved a great deal. He built the first city; his descendants were skilled and gifted as agriculturalists, musicians and metal-workers (Genesis 4.19-22). But it was all valueless to God. Cain's life had no place in God's purposes for this world. And, in fact, his line came to a dead end at the Flood. Only Seth's offspring survived that cataclysm.

In contrast, the fundamental meaning of blessing in the Old Testament is to be fertile, fruitful, prosperous. To be blessed is to live a life that has meaning and purpose. And it's to enjoy God's presence, from Whom all blessing comes.

Faithful Abraham is an outstanding example of a blessed man. Through him "*all the families of the earth*" would be blessed (Genesis 12.3) – including you and me! Abraham's life counted for something in God's eyes. God was working his eternal purposes out through him.

The apostle Paul is another example. He served God faithfully – and God worked His purposes out through him. His life counted for something in God's eyes – he was a blessed man. In the end, he was able to say: "*I have fought the good fight, I have finished the race, I have kept the faith. Henceforth there is laid up for me the crown of righteousness, which the Lord, the righteous judge, will award to me on that Day*" (2 Timothy 4.7-8). How wonderful if we could say that!

Cain is condemned to be "*a fugitive and a wanderer on the earth*" (Genesis 4.14). Victor P. Hamilton comments: "In some ways it is a fate worse than death. It is to lose all sense of belonging and identification with a community. It is to become rootless and detached."

But Cain remains unrepentant. He complains to God about the severity of his punishment! And he fears for his life. He cries "*whoever finds me will kill me*" (Genesis 4.14). His fear reflects the fact that the human race comprises just one family. Everyone alive on the planet is a kinsman of Abel! So anyone he meets might seek to kill him and avenge their kinsman's blood.

Yet Cain's protest is met with astonishing mercy. God places a mark on Cain to protect him. This is, as Derek Kidner explains, "*not a stigma, but a safe-conduct . . . making [God] virtually Cain's gō'ēl or protector; . . . It is the utmost that mercy can do for the unrepentant.*" And God even promises to avenge anyone who kills Cain the murderer!

The emergence of culture

Cain "*went away from the presence of the LORD*". He goes out from God's presence. Most probably, God did not drive him out. Rather, it seems that he found God's holy presence unbearable because of his guilt.

He settles in the land of Nod, east of Eden. This implies he has moved further from the garden than Adam and his family has. "*Nod*" is a play on the Hebrew word *nād*, which means 'wanderer'. We don't know where this land is. It may, in fact, simply be another way of saying that wherever Cain went could be called 'the land of the Wanderer'.

Cain is now a fugitive, banished from society. Cain's wife bore a son called Enoch. He built a city and "*called the name of the city after the name of his son, Enoch*" (Genesis 4.17). Cain probably builds this city to defy God's judgment on him. A city is a place to cease from

wandering and settle down. A city is a haven of security. And Cain names it after his son. He immortalises his firstborn son in the name of this city. Bruce Waltke comments: *“Instead of honouring God, the unbeliever honours humanity.”*

Eastwards – away from God

Cain *“settled in the land of Nod, east of Eden”* (Genesis 4.16). This suggests that he is further east of the Garden of Eden than Adam and his family were. This eastward direction is significant. Here, and in some other significant places in the Old Testament, to go east symbolises *moving away from God’s presence or blessing*.

- ▶ Adam and Eve are expelled *eastwards* from the Garden. We know that because God placed the cherubim and the flaming sword *“at the east of the garden”* (Genesis 3.24).
- ▶ Cain settles east of Eden – *“away from the presence of the LORD”* (Genesis 4.16).
- ▶ The rebellious people who *built* the tower of Babel had *“moved eastward”* (Genesis 11.2 NIV - the footnote also gives the alternatives *“from the east”* or *“in the east”*) to the land of Shinar.
- ▶ Lot journeys *eastwards* to disaster in Sodom (Genesis 13.10-12).
- ▶ Millennia later, God expels His rebellious people *eastwards* to captivity in Babylonia.

Conversely, to travel westwards can mean *to approach God’s presence and enter into His blessing*.

- ▶ Abraham moved west from Ur into the Promised Land.
- ▶ The entrance of the Tabernacle courtyard, and the veils of the Holy Place and the Most Holy Place, are all aligned eastwards (as we’ll see in session 7). So to enter God’s presence in the Tabernacle meant walking *westwards*.
- ▶ Israel entered the Promised Land *westwards* over the Jordan; they returned from exile *westwards* from Babylonia.

Cain begins to establish, in Bernard Bell’s words, *“an alternative society, a godless society away from God’s presence”*. His descendants master the skills of animal husbandry, music and metal-working (Genesis 4.19-22). The arts and technology, foundations of civilisation, flourish.

Yet alongside this sophistication, there is violence. Cain’s ancestor Lamech threatens revenge on any who oppose him (Genesis 4.23-24). Sin begins to spiral out of control.

Murder and forgiveness

Lamech threatens a 77-fold revenge (Genesis 4.24). But contrast what Jesus says. He tells us to forgive 77 times (Matthew 18.22 NIV).

The offspring of the woman

God provided Adam and Eve with another son to take Abel’s place (Genesis 4.25). Eve called him Seth, saying *“God has appointed for me another offspring instead of Abel . . .”*.

When Cain was born, Eve declared *“I have produced a man with the help of the LORD”* (Genesis 4.1). But she called Seth *“another offspring”*. That word *“offspring”* reminds us of God’s promise in Genesis 3.15. Was Eve now looking for the offspring who will bruise the serpents’ head? Perhaps she was.

Seth wasn’t that offspring, of course. But he *was* the ancestor of that offspring. Seth’s direct descendants included Noah, Abraham, David, and finally Jesus. Jesus is God’s promised *“offspring”*.

Seth had a son, Enosh. At that time people began *“to call upon the name of the LORD”* (Genesis 4.26). It seems that some people – perhaps just those of Seth’s family – began to worship God.

The next chapter of Genesis gives us a genealogy (Genesis 5.1-32) from Adam through Seth to Noah and



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“ . . . the earth is filled with violence . . . ” (Genesis 6.13). Riots in Tottenham High Road, London, 2011.

his sons. This genealogy, combined with others in the Bible, allows us to trace Jesus's ancestry right back to Adam and Eve. These genealogies aren't just lists of names. They're a vital part of the Bible story.

Enosh's descendant Enoch walked with God (Genesis 5.22,24; see Hebrews 11.5 and compare Jude 14-15). This righteous man never died; God simply translated him into His presence in heaven. He was one of only two righteous people in the Bible who didn't die. The other is Elijah; his ascension is recorded in 2 Kings 2.1-25.

Enoch's grandson was another Lamech. But he was a complete contrast to the Lamech descended from Cain. Instead of threatening violent revenge, this Lamech yearned for relief from the curse on the ground (Genesis 5.29). Lamech's son was Noah, a righteous man who had faith in God.

Noah – the hope of rest

Lamech named his son Noah (*nōach* in Hebrew), saying, *"Out of the ground that the Lord has cursed, this one shall bring us relief from our work and from the painful toil of our hands"* (Genesis 5.29). The name 'Noah' is derived from the Hebrew verb *nūach*, meaning 'rest'. We've met this word before.

Exodus 20.11 tells us that God *"rested"* on the seventh day. The Hebrew word for *"rested"* here is *nūach*. And in Genesis 2.15, we read that God *"put"* Adam in the Garden of Eden. The Hebrew word for *"put"* is a form of the word *nūach*. In other words, God 'placed Adam at rest' in the Garden.

Lamech names his son Noah. His name is, literally, 'Rest'. Lamech longed for a world released from the curse on the ground, a world without painful toil, a world at rest. In Kenneth Mathews' words: *"By naming his son 'Noah', then, Lamech expresses hope for the human family through his offspring. . . . Lamech looks ahead to a future victory (as [Genesis] 3.15) and prays that Noah will be instrumental in achieving it."*

And God does fulfil Lamech's hope! Noah is a direct ancestor of Jesus – the One Who will indeed bring rest to this world.

The flood of wickedness

Gross evil flooded the Earth (Genesis 6.1-13). Genesis 6.2,4 describes the scene. The *"sons of God"* began to lust after beautiful human girls and marry them.

The sin of these *"sons of God"* echoes the very first sin. Eve *"saw"* that the tree was *"good"* (in Hebrew, *tôb*) for food, and *"took"* of its fruit. These *"sons of God"* *"saw"* that the daughters of man were *"attractive"* (in Hebrew, *tôb*) and they *"took"* as their wives any they chose. The three Hebrew words for (1) 'see', (2) 'good' or 'attractive', and (3) for 'take' are the same in both passages. Eve's sin was the very first sin on Earth. The sin of these *"sons of God"* was also a 'first'. It was a new and horrible kind of sin. Perhaps this is why this passage echoes Genesis 3.



'Noah: the Eve of the Deluge', painted by John Linnell (1792-1882) (Held by the Cleveland Museum of Art, Ohio, USA,

The offspring of the *"sons of God"* were *"the mighty men who were of old, the men of renown"*. They were great warriors, renowned and famous. The phrase *"the men of renown"*, literally translated, is *"the men of name"*. They made a 'name' for themselves - just as those who built Babel's tower would later try to do.

The passage also mentions the mysterious *"Nephilim"*. This name likely means 'fallen ones'. These Nephilim may be the same as the *"mighty men"*.

Who were these *"sons of God"*? We can't be certain. They may have been evil angels – this seems the most likely explanation. Elsewhere in the Old Testament, the *"sons of God"* are indeed heavenly beings (for example Job 1.6 and 2.1). Other explanations include (1) human tyrants, perhaps possessed by fallen angels; or (2) the descendants of Seth.

Exactly what was going on is something of a mystery. If the *"sons of God"* were human tyrants (perhaps possessed by fallen angels), it seems they were gathering great harems of all the women they craved. If they were the descendants of Seth, it seems they were intermarrying with girls descended from Cain.

But the most likely scenario is that the *"sons of God"* were evil angels. They were having sexual intercourse with human women. In the ancient world, stories were told of sexual intercourse between gods and humans. The semi-divine offspring of such unions were said to have abnormal powers. For example, Hercules, famous for his strength, was believed to be the son of the god Zeus and the mortal Alcmena.

At first sight, this seems to conflict with something Jesus said. He said that, after their resurrection, people *"neither marry nor are given in marriage, but are like angels in heaven"* (Matthew 22.30). The angels in heaven do not marry. So how could these angels marry humans? But Jesus was speaking about good angels – and good angels certainly don't marry. But this was a very different scenario. These angels were evil. And they weren't marrying other angels; they were marrying humans.

If this is indeed what was going on, then these evil angels had crossed a 'species' boundary that God had set in

place between angels and humans. These angels should never have breached this boundary. It was wickedness of the most heinous kind. This ‘crossing of a boundary’ may well be what Jude is referring to when he speaks about angels *“who did not stay within their own position of authority, but left their proper dwelling”*.

This ‘crossing of a boundary’ is also suggested by what Jude says next. He says that these angels’ sin was like the *“sexual immorality”* and *“unnatural desire”* of the inhabitants of Sodom and Gomorrah. Genesis 19 records that the men of Sodom were threatening Lot’s angelic visitors with homosexual rape. Sexual relations between men (see Leviticus 18.22, 20.13, Romans 1.26-27) also crosses a God-ordained boundary.

Peter also mentions angels who sinned (2 Peter 2.4). Both this passage and the passage in Jude probably refer to the evil angels of Genesis 6. These angels may well also be *“the spirits in prison”* to which Jesus proclaimed His victory and their defeat (1 Peter 3.19-20).

Evil engulfed this world. *“The Lord saw that the wickedness of man was great in the earth, and that every intention of the thoughts of his heart was only evil continually. . . . Now the earth was corrupt in God’s sight, and the earth was filled*

with violence. And God saw the earth, and behold, it was corrupt, for all flesh had corrupted their way on the earth.” (Genesis 6.5,11-12). God is heartbroken: *“And the Lord regretted that he had made man on the earth, and it grieved him to his heart.”* (Genesis 6.11-12).

So our gracious God stepped in to stem the hellish tide of sin. He said *“I will blot out man whom I have created from the face of the land, man and animals and creeping things and birds of the heavens, for I am sorry that I have made them.”* (Genesis 6.7).

Noah

But among the mass of corrupt humanity, there is a righteous man. His name was Noah. He was a man of faith (Hebrews 11.7) who walked with God (Genesis 6.9).

God said to Noah *“I will establish my covenant with you”* (Genesis 6.18). Noah was to be a man *in covenant relationship with God*.

And God promises to save Noah and his family from drowning in the Flood. Through Noah and his family, God will preserve the human race.

The Flood



Image © Ceinturion : Wikimedia (CC BY-SA 3.0)

A full-scale replica of Noah’s Ark in Dordrecht, Holland. It was built by Johan Huibers, and is open to the public. The ark is carried on a platform made up of 25 LASH barges and has a coaster’s seaworthiness licence.

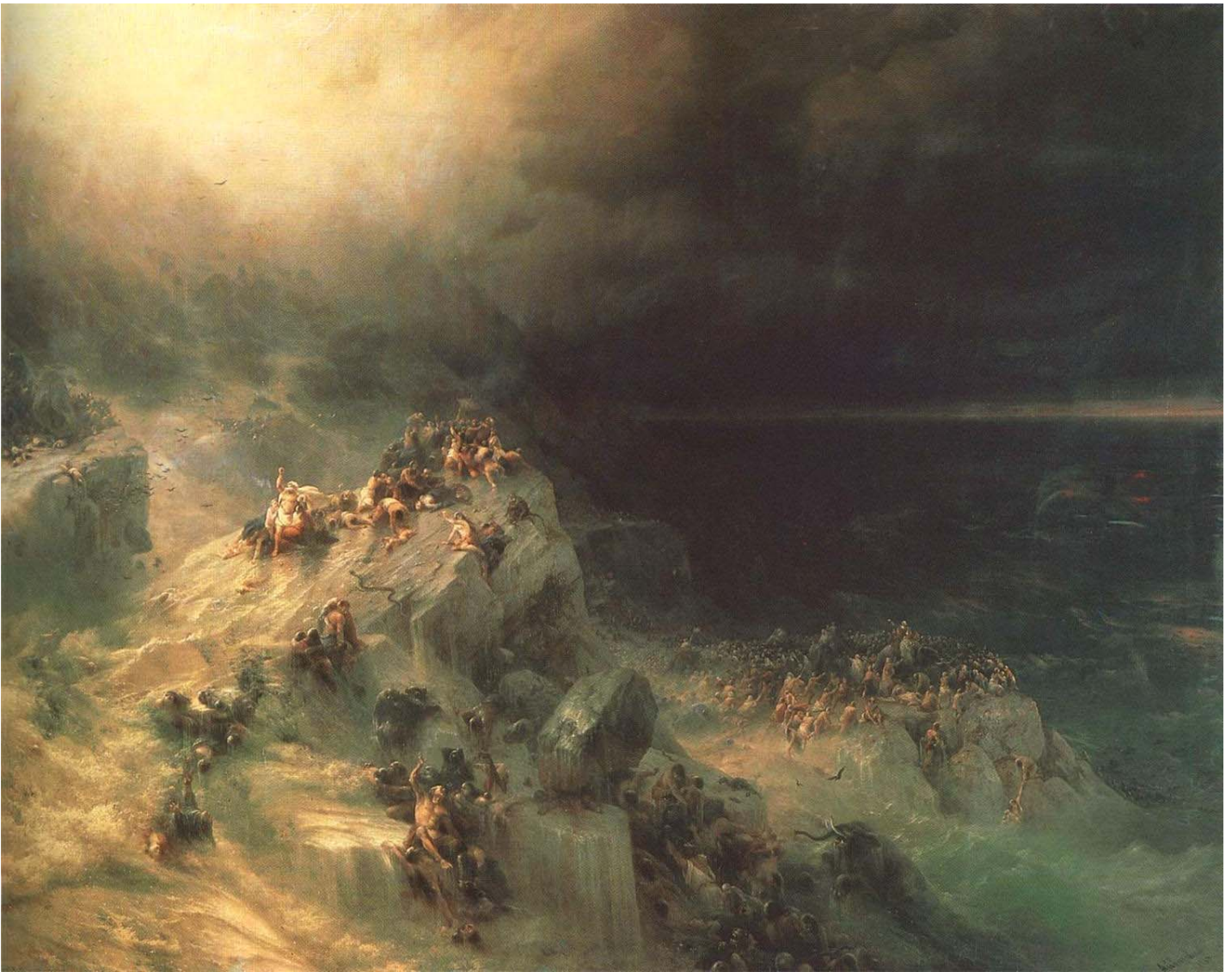
God’s flood of judgment

God takes Noah into His confidence (Genesis 6.13-21). He tells him that he plans to destroy mankind. He then commands him to build an enormous boat in which he and his immediate family, together with a whole menagerie of creatures, would be saved.

This boat was gigantic. It was around 450 feet long – that’s around half as long as the Titanic. It was 75 feet wide and 45 feet high (these measurements assume that

the cubit was around 18 inches long). It would have had a displacement of about 43,000 tons, and a deck area of around 95,700 square feet (8,891 square metres).

God gave Noah the blueprint; the ark had good seaworthy proportions and was large enough to give it stability in the churning floodwaters. The project must have taken decades. Noah obediently *“did all that God commanded him”* (Genesis 6.22). Doubtless faithful Noah endured years of mockery and humiliation as he laboured on this project.



'Deluge', painted by Ivan Aivazovsky (1817-1900). A dramatic depiction of Noah's Flood.

The day came when God told Noah and family to embark, and take the creatures on board. God Himself shut the door. The whole flood lasted for just over a year. Rain fell and *“the fountains of the great deep”* gushed out for 40 days. The ark floated about for another 111 days before grounding (Genesis 8.4). Another 74 days (assuming a 30-day month) and the hill tops appeared. Two more months elapsed before the ground appeared dry. Another 57 days, and God gave the command to disembark.

Noah's first act is to offer burnt offerings to God. It was an act of devotion, worship and thanksgiving.

A new creation

Notice how the flood echoes the creation account in Genesis 1. The primeval Earth was submerged by water (Genesis 1.2). The flood returns Earth to its original condition – flooded with water.

Then God sent a 'wind' (Hebrew *rûach*) over the land (Genesis 8.1). This recalls how His Spirit (Hebrew *rûach*) moved over the Earth at the beginning (Genesis 1.2).

The waters receded and dry land appeared, just as they did on the third creation day (Genesis 1.9-10). It was like a new creation.

The ark came to rest *“on the mountains of Ararat”* (Genesis 8.4). This is in the region of what's now called Armenia, but the text doesn't locate the exact spot. Perhaps the ark came to rest in a valley in this mountain range, rather than on a mountain itself. Noah and his entourage stepped out onto a cleansed and restored land.

Global or local?

Traditions of a great flood are told by tribes and nations all over the world. But the Flood is history, not legend. Careful details prove the historical nature of the account. The ark's dimensions would satisfy any shipbuilder; and (as Bruce Waltke notes) *“Precise dates, . . . invest the story with . . . historical credibility”*. Depths are measured precisely; the ark docks in a named geographical spot.

Did the Flood inundate the entire globe? The issue is debated.

► Mankind hadn't colonised the whole globe

To destroy mankind, God didn't need to send a global flood. In Noah's day people clustered in one area of the Middle East. They only dispersed worldwide after God scattered them (Genesis 11.9). So the fact that people

across the world have flood traditions doesn't necessarily indicate a global flood – their ancestors all lived in the Middle East at the time.



A neo-Assyrian clay tablet, known as the 'Flood Tablet', and held by the British Museum. It is tablet 11 of the Epic of Gilgamesh, and contains a flood story similar to that in the Biblical narrative. This story seems to be an ancient pagan recollection of the actual Flood recorded in the Bible.

► What about today's mountain ranges?

Earth's highest mountains today are over five miles high. If they were covered by the Flood, where did all the water come from?

Were mountains originally much lower – thus allowing for them to be completely covered? If so, then the mountains must have quickly risen to their present heights after the Flood. One theory that's been put forward to account for such rapid mountain-building is 'catastrophic plate tectonics'. But this theory is speculative and open to debate. For example, it's been argued that this process would generate more than enough heat to boil the oceans dry.

► 'Heaven' and 'earth' may have local meanings.

The Hebrew word for "*earth*" in Genesis 7.3,4,6,10,12, etc., is '*erets*'. This word can also mean 'a land' or 'region', rather than the entire Earth.

We also read that the flood covered all the high mountains "*under the whole heaven*" (Genesis 7.19). This may, of course, denote the entire globe. It could also denote a region of the globe. Compare the context of this same phrase "*under the whole heaven*" in Deuteronomy 2.25. And other Bible passages use global language to designate a smaller region. Compare the phrases "*the whole earth*" in 1 Kings 10.24, "*all the world*" in Luke 2.1, and "*from every nation under heaven*" in Acts 2.5.

Genesis 7.19 tells us that "*all the high mountains under the whole heaven were covered*". The Hebrew word for "*mountains*" here can mean 'hills' as well as 'mountains'.

The area colonized by mankind at the time of the flood may have just been Mesopotamia, a generally flat area. To inundate that region might not need a flood more than a few hundred feet deep.

So the Hebrew text could indicate either a local or global flood. And, like the creation account, the Flood would naturally have been described from the viewpoint of those who actually observed it. The Flood stretched as far as Noah's eye could see - from his vantage point, the whole land was indeed covered.

► If the Flood was local, why didn't Noah migrate?

But if the Flood was indeed local, then why did God command Noah to build an ark? All he and his family would have needed to do was to migrate beyond the flooded region and return when the floodwaters had subsided.

But if they *had* migrated, doubtless many other people - relatives, friends and hangers-on - would have tried to join them. A secret departure would then be in order. But such a departure, in Arthur Custance's words: "*could hardly act as the kind of warning that the deliberate construction of the ark must have done*". The spectacle of Noah and his workers labouring for decades on this colossal boat, probably many miles from the sea, must have thundered out God's stark warning to that dissolute generation in a way nothing else could have done!

► How did all the animals and plants survive?

If the Flood was global, then Noah must have taken on board two of every kind of creature that could not survive the floodwaters (and seven pairs of the ritually clean ones). How were they fed, and how did he and his family care for them and keep the ark clean for an entire year? One solution that's been put forward is that the Bible word for 'kind' is wider than the modern word 'species'. Noah only needed to take two (or seven) of each 'kind' (according to one estimate, around 8,000 pairs). They then diversified rapidly after the Flood into the multitude of species alive today.

In a local Flood scenario, Noah would have needed to take on board relatively few creatures – domesticated animals and birds, and others that to some extent depended on man's activities (such as agriculture) for success. It would also have included animals essential to the ecology of the region.

The covenant with Noah

After Noah had sacrificed burnt offerings to God, God said in His heart, "*I will never again curse the ground because of man, . . . Neither will I ever again strike down every living creature as I have done.*" He made a covenant with Noah "*I establish my covenant with you, that never again shall all flesh be cut off by the waters of the flood, and never again shall there be a flood to destroy the earth.*" (Genesis 9.11). The sign of that covenant was a rainbow (Genesis 9.12-17)



Image © Greg Knapp · Flickr (CC BY 2.0)

After the Flood, God promised: *"While the earth remains, seedtime and harvest, cold and heat, summer and winter, day and night, shall not cease."* (Genesis 8.22).
Wheat being harvested in England.

► COVENANTS ◀

The **bond** joining God and His kingdom people God made a covenant with Noah (Genesis 6.18, 9.9-17). This is the first time we meet the word 'covenant' in the Bible. Through the Bible, we see God making covenants with people a number of times – as we'll see at the end of this session. In fact, making covenants is a *natural* thing for God to do.

This is because our God is a *relational* being. In Donald Macleod's words, "There is a social life in the Godhead The Father, the Son and the Holy Spirit live in community and fellowship." And God made us in His image. We're relational beings, too.

And relationships are based on *covenants*. For example, in session 1 we saw that covenants are at the heart of our own human relations of marriage and parenthood.

God wants to be in *relationship* with people. So it's no surprise to find God making covenants with them.

What did the Flood achieve?

God promised never to send another Flood like the Genesis Flood. There have been many catastrophic floods since that day, of course. But there has never been another flood like that one. What that flood achieved has never needed repeating.

So what *did* God achieve through the Flood? Of course, the Flood didn't solve the problem of human sin. Before the Flood *"the wickedness of man was great in the earth, and . . . every intention of the thoughts of his heart was only evil continually"* (Genesis 6.5). After the Flood *"the intention of man's heart"* is still *"evil from his youth"*.

The Flood didn't put paid to sin. But it did deal with *the particular kind of sin* that the *"sons of God"* committed. That kind of sin has never erupted again.

As we've argued above, the sin described in Genesis 6.1-2 most likely involved crossing the boundary between angels and humans.

If so, then there's something even more sinister about the sin instigated by *"the sons of God"*. It also threatened God's promise of an Offspring Who would *"bruise"* Satan's head.

How so? Because if these *"sons of God"* were indeed having sex with humans, then their offspring would have been genetically mixed - part human, part angelic. And if God hadn't stepped in, the whole human race would eventually have been contaminated - including the ancestors of the promised Offspring. And if that had happened, the promised Offspring could not be born, Satan would not be crushed, and mankind could never be saved.

God could never allow this to happen. The Flood would have destroyed all their half-human offspring and preserved the integrity of the human race. And so the threat to the promised Offspring would have been removed.



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"When I bring clouds over the earth and the bow is seen in the clouds, I will remember my covenant that is between me and you and every living creature of all flesh. And the waters shall never again become a flood to destroy all flesh." (Genesis 9.14-15).

A new creation; a new Fall



'Descent of Noah from Ararat', painted by Ivan Aivazovsky (1817-1900) (Held by the National Gallery of Armenia). The artist brilliantly captures the scene of Noah and his family, and the animals coming down into a new cleansed earth (with a minor artistic licence – more than 8 people are depicted).

Noah was like another Adam, stepping out into a new clean world. It was like a new creation:

- God speaks to mankind (Genesis 2.16-17, Genesis 1.28-30). He relates to him.
- God blessed Adam and Eve (Genesis 1.28). He blessed Noah and his sons (Genesis 9.1).
- God commanded Adam and Eve to be fruitful and multiply and fill the Earth (Genesis 1.28); He did the same to Noah and his sons (Genesis 9.1,7).
- God gave Adam dominion over the animals (Genesis 1.26,28). God gave every beast, bird and fish into the hands of Noah and his sons (Genesis 9.2).
- God appointed food for Adam (Genesis 1.29); He appointed food for Noah and his sons (Genesis 9.3-4).
- God planted a garden (Genesis 2.8); Noah planted a vineyard (Genesis 9.20).

► NEW ADAMS ◀

Through whom God's people come into being

● Noah ● Abraham ● JESUS

Genesis 10.32 tells us *"These are the clans of the sons of Noah, . . . from these the nations spread abroad on the earth after the flood"*. Everyone born since the Flood is descended from one of Noah's three sons, and thus from Noah himself.

Adam was a progenitor of the whole human race. Noah was a progenitor of the whole human race born since the Flood. So Noah is a kind of new Adam.

We read, too, that *"God made man in his own image"* (Genesis 9.6) – a direct echo of Genesis 1.27.

But, in Derek Kidner's words, *"sin has darkened the scene"*. We don't return to unfallen innocence. Violence is an ugly fact of human life. God now institutes the death penalty for a murderer. Animals now live in fear of mankind – perhaps both to reduce their threat to us and to protect them from depredation by us.

And we are now (in Bruce Waltke's words) *"predators on the top of the food chain"*; God gives us animals to kill and eat for food.

But God forbids us to consume blood (see also, for example, Leviticus 3.17 and Deuteronomy 12.16). Why? Blood is the vehicle of life. We ourselves speak of 'lifeblood' (a term the NIV actually uses in Genesis 9.4-5). Leviticus 17.11 says: *"the life of the flesh is in the blood"*. So, in the Old Testament, blood represents life. And life is from God. So, to show respect for life, and respect for God Who gave that life, blood isn't to be consumed.

As we'll see in Session 7, blood was used in the sacrificial rituals that God gave Israel. Blood could only be used for those sacred purposes (Leviticus 17.11-12).

Another Fall

The *"intention of man's heart"* was still *"evil from his youth"* (Genesis 8.21). And, so there was another Fall. This Fall, like the one in the Garden of Eden, involved fruit. In Noah's case, it involved a product of fruit - wine. Adam's sin caused nakedness and shame (Genesis 3.7-

10); so did Noah's (Genesis 9.21-23). Adam's sin called down a curse (Genesis 3.14-19); so did Noah's (Genesis 9.25-27).

Genesis 9.20-25 tells the story. *"Noah . . . planted a vineyard. He drank of the wine and became drunk and lay uncovered in his tent. And Ham, the father of Canaan, saw the nakedness of his father and told his two brothers outside. Then Shem and Japheth took a garment, laid it on both their shoulders, and walked backward and covered the nakedness of their father. Their faces were turned backward, and they did not see their father's nakedness. When Noah awoke . . . and knew what his youngest son had done to him, he said, "Cursed be Canaan; . . ."*

Perhaps life had become rather boring and Noah took to wine. Before the Flood, he'd kept himself pure in a wicked world. He preached to the godless generation around him (2 Peter 2.5). He rose undaunted to the massive task of building the ark - doubtless enduring mockery and ridicule from all around!

But now there was no ship to build, no crowds to preach to. Temptation can often be fiercest in the mundane, humdrum, *ordinary* times of life. Noah did nothing intrinsically wrong by planting a vineyard, or by drinking wine. Indeed, the psalmist celebrates wine as God's provision *"to gladden the heart of man"* (Psalm 104.15). Jesus Himself not only drank wine, but *created* wine - the very best vintage, too (John 2.1-11)!



Image © Neil Weightman (CC BY 2.0)

"Noah began to be a man of the soil, and he planted a vineyard." (Genesis 9.20).

But wine dulls our mental powers. Priests were forbidden it during their periods of duty (Leviticus 10.9); elders and deacons aren't to drink to excess (1 Timothy 3.3,8, Titus 1.7). And drunkenness in this fallen world is so often associated with degradation - including nakedness (see Habakkuk 2.15, Lamentations 4.21).

Perhaps Noah drank rather too much and exposed himself in his tent. Ham saw him in that state of undress. Allen P. Ross comments: *"It is difficult for people living in the modern world to . . . appreciate the modesty . . . called for in ancient morality. Nakedness in the Old Testament was from the beginning a thing of shame for fallen humankind."* To be naked was a thing of shame (see Isaiah 47.3, Revelation 3.18).

Ham's sight of his naked father was, it seems, no

unavoidable glance, but a deliberate and disgusting act of voyeurism. Such an act violated Noah's dignity. Ham humiliated his father further by announcing to his brothers what he'd seen. Respect for parents (see Exodus 20.12, 21.15,17, Leviticus 19.3, 20.9, Deuteronomy 21.18-21, Mark 7.10), and for the elderly in general (Leviticus 19.32) was central to ancient society. Not only was Noah Ham's aged father, but he had, by his righteous faith, saved Ham's life. Ham should have revered him. Instead he seized the chance to dishonour him.

But Ham's brothers Shem and Japheth, out of reverence, stepped backwards and covered their sleeping father.

Other explanations for Ham's behaviour have been put forward. For example, it's been suggested that Ham committed incest with Noah's wife. This explains Noah's anger and subsequent curse well. Ham *"saw the nakedness of his father"* (Genesis 9.22). In Leviticus 20.17, to 'see' someone's nakedness' is to 'uncover' their nakedness; in this verse, that's a euphemism for incest. And Leviticus 20.11 explicitly states: *"If a man lies with his father's wife, he has uncovered his father's nakedness"*.

If this explanation is correct, then Ham's act may have been an attempt to usurp his father as leader of the family - and consequently the human race at that time. And that would explain well why he openly announced to his brothers what he'd done. There are biblical parallels to this. For example, Absalom slept with David's concubines to strengthen his position (2 Samuel 16.21-22).

Another curse

Noah curses Canaan, Ham's son. But he blesses Shem and Japheth (Genesis 9.24-27). His words are prophetic. They relate to the course of redemptive history.

But why does Noah curse Canaan, not Ham? A number of reasons suggest themselves. Firstly, God had earlier blessed Ham along with his brothers and father (Genesis 9.1), and Noah couldn't undo that. Secondly, as Bruce Waltke points out, *"Since the curses and blessings on the three sons have their descendants in view, it is not strange that the curse falls on Ham's son, rather than Ham himself"*. Thirdly, the text twice points out that Ham was Canaan's father (Genesis 9.18,22), a phrase that seems to imply more than lineage - in Allen Ross's words, it *"suggests that Noah anticipated in [Canaan] the evil traits that marked his father Ham"*.

Finally, if Canaan was indeed the fruit of Ham's incest with Noah's wife, then it would be easy to see why Noah cursed him.

Whatever happened between Ham and Noah, it involved sexual perversion. And such perversion resurfaced in Canaan's offspring. The Canaanites' depravity is legendary. The Law warned God's fledgling people against the Canaanites' vile sexual practices (Leviticus 18.1-30). The repeated references to nakedness remind us of Ham's crime.

The outworking of Noah’s curse fell on the Canaanites. God commanded Israel to destroy them and their idols (Deuteronomy 7.1-5). It’s important to understand, however, that the Canaanites suffered destruction not because of Ham’s sin, but because of their own sin.

And remember that one Canaanite and her family discovered God’s mercy. God rescued prostitute Rahab and her family because she trusted God (Joshua 6.17,22-25). Celebrated as a hero of faith (Hebrews 11.31), she is almost certainly the Rahab of Matthew 1.5, one of Jesus’s ancestors.

But Noah blessed Shem and Japheth, who acted to protect their father. Notice that Noah says: *“Blessed be the God of Shem”* (Genesis 9.26). God is the God of Shem. In Bruce Waltke’s words: *“The blessed Creator of all life and Lord of all history commits Himself to Shem.”* That was the greatest blessing he could enjoy. And Shem’s family line would one day include Abraham, the ancestor of God’s people. Ultimately, of course, Shem’s family line would lead to Jesus Christ Himself.

Future blessing for Ham, Shem and Japheth

One day, God was going to bring blessing to the descendants of all three of Noah’s sons. And that includes Ham! The Psalmist sees a time when Hamites are among those born in Zion itself (Psalm 87.3-6)! Isaiah prophesies that descendants of Ham would be blessed with Israel (Isaiah 19.23-25). And the Book of Acts sees the Gospel reaching out to all three branches of mankind, as we’ll see in session 12.

The Table of Nations

Immediately after Noah’s prophecy, the Bible gives us a long genealogy (Genesis 10.1-32). It’s often called ‘The Table of Nations’. Japheth’s descendants are listed first (Genesis 10.2-5), then Ham’s (Genesis 10.6-20), and finally Shem’s (Genesis 10.21-31). It’s a kind of sketch map of ancient world history. This genealogy is selective, rather than complete. And it’s more than just a list of names.

► It demonstrates that we’re all one family

The list hits home how closely related we all are. Only a few hundred generations have passed since mankind was a mere eight people.

► It prepares us for Abraham’s debut

In the chapter following this genealogy, Abraham appears on the stage of history. Through this man, all the nations of the world would be blessed – nations that sprang from the people and nations listed here.

► It introduces us to enemies of God’s people

In this genealogy we encounter the most significant enemies of God’s people in Old Testament times.

The list includes Egypt (Genesis 10.6,13), who enslaved God’s people. It also names the Canaanites, who were conquered by Israel. The genealogy includes Nimrod (Genesis 10.8-12) and cities he founded. The one named first is Babylon (NIV) or Babel (ESV), which became the capital of Babylonia. Assyria is named - this may well



Map of the nations catalogued in Genesis 10.1-32.

Map from the Holman Bible Atlas. Copyright © 1998 Broadman and Holman Publishers.

have been part of Nimrod's dominions, too. These two empires – Assyria and Babylonia – would one day conquer Israel and Judah respectively.

The Philistines also appear in the genealogy (Genesis 10.14). It's not clear if and how these relate to the Philistines that plagued the Israelites after the conquest. But the name does point us forward to these fearsome enemies of God's people.

► It's the background to Babel

Nimrod was *"a mighty hunter before the LORD"* (Genesis 10.9). He seems to have been a great tyrant. One of his cities was *"Babel, . . . in the land of Shinar"* (Genesis 10.10). This city's name anticipates the account of the tower of Babel in Genesis 11.1-9. The city and tower of Babel were built before Nimrod's time. Later on, Nimrod took that city over as one of the centres of his kingdom.

Babel to babble

Genesis 11.1-9 is a kind of flashback; it explains how the nations came to be divided, probably at the time of Peleg (Genesis 10.25).

From history's dawn until many years after the Flood, mankind had one language and culture. Sometime after the Flood, people settled in a plain in the land of Shinar. There they began to build a city and a tower.

Ziggurat

Ziggurats are monumental temple-towers found throughout the area of ancient Mesopotamia. They were commonly built of sun-dried mud and straw bricks held in position with bitumen as mortar. Stairways ascended to the top of these structures, where a small temple/shrine sat on the summit. The illustration below depicts the Ziggurat of Nanna at Ur, which was constructed during the reign of Ur-Nammu (c. 2113–2095 B.C.). Its area covered 150 x 200 feet (46 x 61 m), and its height was 80 feet (24 m). It is commonly believed that this type of structure was being built in the Tower of Babel episode (Gen. 11:1–9). The text indicates that the builders of Babel had discovered the process of making mud bricks and that they employed "bitumen for mortar" (v. 3). Based on that invention, the builders decided "to build . . . a tower with its top in the heavens" (v. 4).

An act of rebellion

This project was an act of self-assertion against God, a titanic revolt against Him.

► They feared being scattered

They built the city and tower, so they weren't *"dispersed over the face of the whole earth"* (Genesis 11.4). They wanted to establish a concentrated power-base – a secure, united society. Derek Kidner comments, *"they crowd together to preserve their identity and control their fortunes"*. But God had commanded mankind to multiply and spread across the globe (see Genesis 1.28). The Babelites were disobeying God.

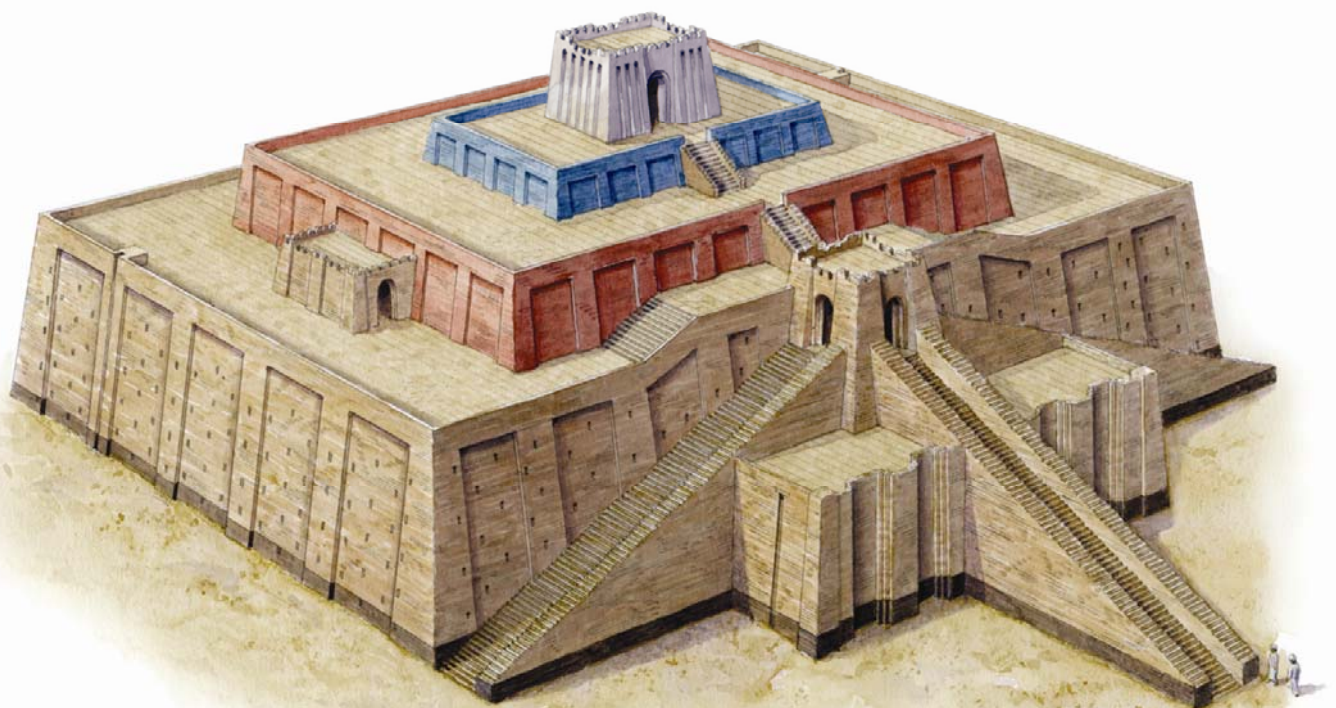
► They wanted fame and reputation

They wanted to make *"a name"* for themselves (Genesis 11.4) – to find enduring fame through their own achievements. It was pure egotism.

► They wanted to create a 'heaven on Earth'

The name 'Babel' in the local language Akkadian is *bāb-ili*, meaning 'gate of god'. The tower of Babel was, it seems certain, a kind of ziggurat. Ziggurats were temple towers with a shrine at the top.

In the Bible, we find God meeting with His people on mountains. He gave them His Law on Mount Sinai. The



Temple, where He lived among His people, was on a mountain - Mount Zion. The Garden of Eden, too, was most likely to have been on high ground - God's 'holy mountain' where He met with Adam and Eve.



Image © Daniel Schwen : Wikipedia.org (CC BY-SA 4.0)

El Castillo (Spanish for 'the castle'), also known as the Temple of Kukulkan. It's a Mesoamerican step-pyramid that dominates the centre of the Chichen Itza archaeological site in the Mexican state of Yucatán. It was built by the Maya people between the 9th and 12th centuries AD. It was a temple to the god Kukulkan. It's fascinating how similar this temple is to a Mesopotamian ziggurat – with stepped sides, stairways for ascending it, and the temple at the top. In fact, step pyramids were built by several cultures throughout history, in several locations throughout the world. God scattered people at Babel. But as they colonised the Earth, some tribes continued to build temples in this style.

It seems that the inhabitants of Babel wanted a 'holy mountain', too. They wanted to have contact with Heaven. This explanation is supported by what we know of Babylonian ziggurats. They had stairs leading up to the shrine at the top. They were believed to be stairways from heaven to Earth, where heaven touched Earth – a kind of 'heaven on earth'. They were places where humanity had contact with the realm of the divine. As we've just noted, 'Babel' itself means 'gate of god'.

But they lived in a "a plain" (Genesis 11.2), where there weren't any mountains. So they built one themselves.

But only God decides where He meets with mankind. By building this tower without God's instruction, they were acting in independence from Him.

Babel was, as Allen Ross explains, "the prototype of all nations, cities, and empires that raise themselves in pride". William Dumbrell wrote: "Babel expressed a naive and total confidence in what human achievement could effect. It looked for one world, one common language family, one common social and economic platform In short, it was the beginning of the utopian humanistic dream to which mankind has always subsequently aspired." In short, Babel is a picture of mankind's attempts to create a perfect world.

But the Babelites failed – as all human attempts to build paradise will do. They tried to build a tower "with its top in the heavens". But "the Lord came down to see the city and the tower" (Genesis 11.5). The tower never reached heaven – it never came even close! God had to come down to see it! By God's standards it was puny – a complete failure.

God's response

At that time, everyone spoke the same language. Ease of communication and swift transfer of ideas gave mankind

power. It allowed them speedily to gain technical skills and develop political and economic systems. God saw that "nothing that they propose to do will now be impossible for them" (Genesis 11.6). Satan's goal – a worldwide ideological, economic and political system united in revolt against God - would not be long in coming. The consequences are too awful to contemplate.

And so, once again, our gracious God intervened to save mankind from ruin. He shattered mankind's power by fragmenting them into language groups. Starting from the time of the scattering, a staggering number of languages have come into being. For example, over 800 languages now exist within the island of New Guinea alone! God "dispersed them from there over the face of all the earth, and they left off building the city" (Genesis 11.8). By impeding communication, God slowed the development of human civilisation to a safer pace.

We tend to think of human unity as a good thing. But because of sin, such solidarity is dangerous. Mankind, inspired by Satan, still dreams of a unified and atheistic political and economic system. That God-defying climax will come one day. But the language barrier prevents it occurring before its proper time. Ominously, that barrier is being breached with the rise of English as an international medium of communication.



Image © Patrick Gruban (CC BY-SA 2.0)

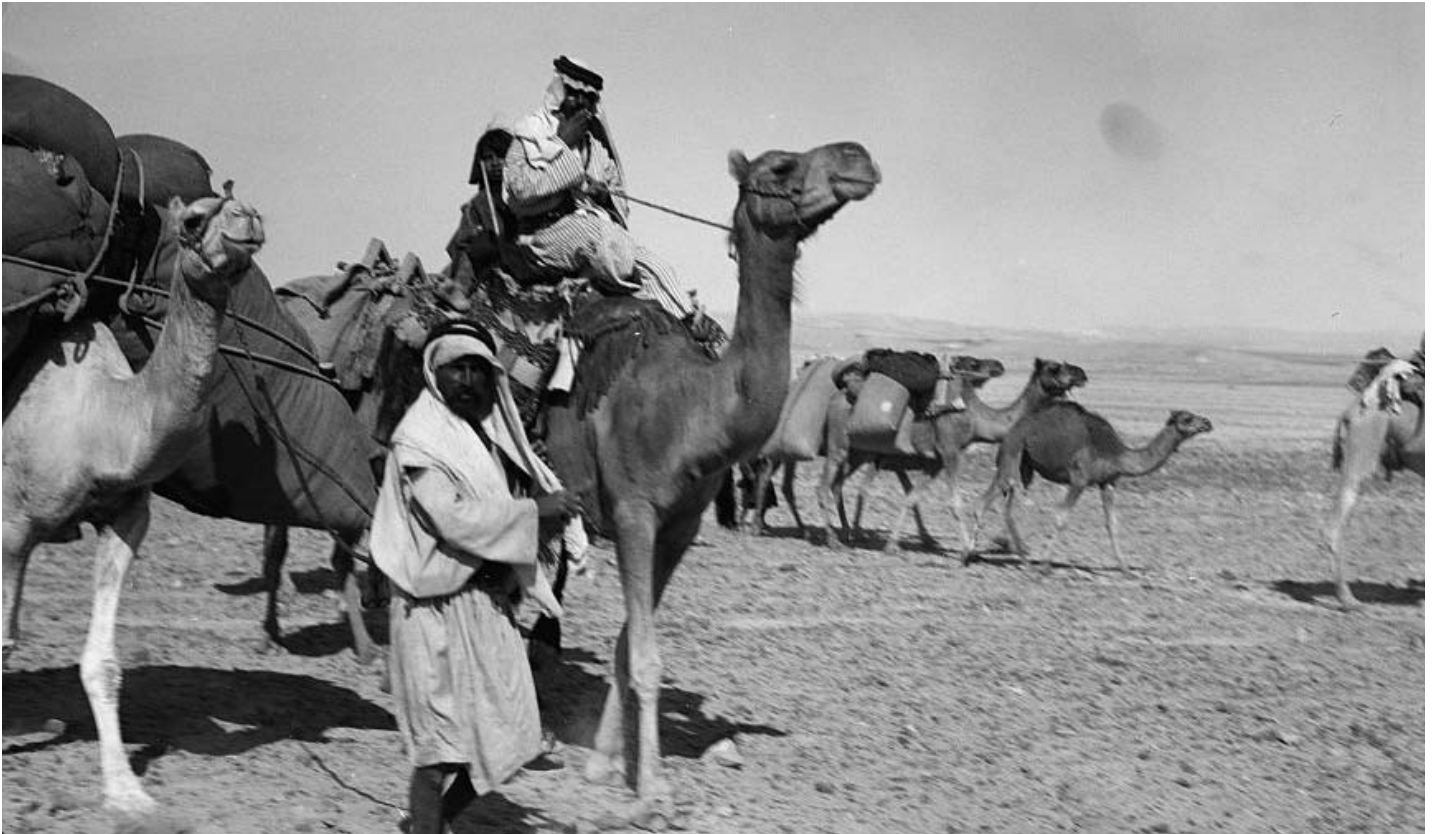
The United Nations General Assembly hall. The UN is an international organisation which aims to facilitate co-operation in international law, international security, economic development, social progress, human rights, and achievement of world peace. This organisation is part of mankind's present-day efforts to achieve global unity

The Day of Pentecost – reversing Babel

God has always wanted humanity to be one - but united under His Lordship. On the Day of Pentecost (Acts 2.1-13) God's Holy Spirit began to gather His new community from every tongue, race and national allegiance.

What happened on that day reversed what happened to the people of Babel. God confused the Babelites' language; on the Day of Pentecost everyone heard of God's wonderful works in their own tongue. God scattered the Babelites; on the Day of Pentecost people "from every nation under heaven" (Acts 2.5) were gathered together. No man-made unity this - it is a unity that God's Spirit brings (compare Ephesians 4.3). In Bruce Waltke's words: "Unity cannot be engineered, it is [a] matter of the Spirit."

God's man of faith



"By faith Abraham obeyed when he was called to go out And he went out, not knowing where he was going." (Hebrews 11.8). Abraham may have used camels on his emigration from Ur, and certainly possessed them later in life (Genesis 12.16, 24.10,32,63). The image is an early photograph of a camel caravan in the Negev/Sinai region, published between 1934 and 1939.

Genesis 11.10-26 is the genealogy of Noah's son Shem. It continues where Genesis 5.1-32 left off, and takes us all the way to a man called Abram (whom God later renamed Abraham). Abram is arguably the most important Bible figure aside from Jesus Himself.

At this point the Bible leaves the arena of world history and zooms in to focus on this man Abram and his offspring - God's chosen people.

Through Abram and his offspring, God was going to bring mankind back into paradise and live there with His people. The rest of the Bible tells us how He does this. John Stott commented: "It may truly be said without exaggeration that not only the rest of the Old Testament but the whole of the New Testament are an outworking of these promises of God."

In Genesis 12.1-3 we read how God calls this man to follow Him and promises him great things. He said *"Go from your country and your kindred and your father's house to the land that I will show you. And I will make of you a great nation, and I will bless you and make your name great, so that you will be a blessing. I will bless those who bless you, and him who dishonors you I will curse, and in you all the families of the earth shall be blessed."* Bernard Bell remarks, "The word 'bless' is prominent, used five times. God had created the world for blessing, but humanity had frustrated that purpose. God is determined to bless his world, so this is what he started to do with Abram."

God reinforces and expands these promises several times over many years: (1) Genesis 12.7 (2) Genesis 13.14-17; (3) Genesis 15.1-21; (4) Genesis 17.1-21; (5) Genesis 18.9-15; (6) Genesis 21.12; (7) Genesis 22.15-18.

Abraham's call launches a whole new phase in God's plan. This is where the history of God's people begins (see Nehemiah 9.7 and Acts 7.2-3). Vaughan Roberts says: *"Genesis 12:1-3 is the text the rest of the Bible expounds"*.

Notice how Abram's story links back to the story of Babel. As Michael Williams puts it: *"God graciously promises to Abraham the very things Babel coveted . . ."* They wanted a **name** – enduring greatness and fame. And they wanted to build a **city** and a tower. Neither a city nor a name are, in themselves, bad things. Their sin lay in the fact they wanted to get these things *their* way and for *their* glory. God promised Abram exactly these two things – a **name** and a **city**.

- God said to Abram: *"I will . . . make your name great"* (Genesis 12.2). God was going to make Abram's **name** famous - but now for all the right reasons. Abraham will be great - not because he's made himself great, but because *God* has blessed him.
- And Abram looked for a **city** - not a city built by humans for human glory, but *"the city that has foundations, whose designer and builder is God"* (Hebrews 11.10).

We'll look more closely at what God promised Abram in our next session.

God's strategy in human history

At this point, let's remind ourselves of what's really going on here on Earth.

Satan has seized a foothold on Earth. He holds fallen humanity in his grip. His aim is a false 'heaven on Earth' - a global and godless human civilisation that's united in rebellion against God. His plan will come to a head in the emergence of the final Antichrist at the end of this age.

But in the midst of all this wickedness, God is gathering a people for Himself. He began with Abraham and the nation of Israel that sprang from him. Now He is calling people from every tribe and nation on the planet. The Church - though weak to human eyes and suffering trials and persecution - spreads and grows across the globe. And, in Paul Billheimer's words: *"Through the use of her weapons of prayer and faith, [the Church] holds in this present moment the balance of power in world affairs"*.

Earth is a battleground - Satan and his forces wage war against God and His people. Central to this cosmic conflict are two cities and two offsprings.

A tale of two cities

The Bible is a tale of two cities - God's city, and Satan's city. These two cities are not cities as we know them. They *symbolise* something very important.

What do they symbolise? Think of a typical city. It's more than just a sprawl of buildings where lots of people live and work. It's a commercial hub and a cultural centre (see the description of Babylon in Revelation 18.11-19). It's also typically a seat of government, whether local or national. A city is often a religious centre, too. For example, most English cities have a cathedral.

So a city is a *centre of civilization*. A city symbolises *civilisation*. Consequently the 'ideal' city symbolises 'ideal' civilisation. It symbolises a perfect human society, a perfect world. In ancient mythology the 'ideal' city was, as Richard Bauckham puts it, *"the place where human community lives in security and prosperity with the divine in the midst"*.

Babylon and Jerusalem respectively represent Satan's and God's vision of what this world should be like. Satan wants a world under his domination. God wants a world where He lives among His people, where *"God himself will be with them as their God."* (Revelation 21.3).

God's city

God began with a garden in Eden. But that garden was, so to speak, just a 'building site'. God planned to build a 'city' on Earth.

God's first city was Jerusalem. That city was in a 'garden'. That garden was the Promised Land, a land like the Garden of Eden - fertile, well-watered (Deuteronomy 8.7-10; 11.9-12), and flowing *"with milk and honey"* (Exodus 3.8). God made His home in Jerusalem. He lived

there among His people. It was His capital city, from where He reigned over the whole land. His royal palace was the Temple, which Solomon built (2 Chronicles 3.1).

But earthly Jerusalem was just a shadow of the real thing. The true and eternal city of God is New Jerusalem, the *"the city of the living God"* (Hebrews 12.22). God is its *"designer and builder"* (Hebrews 11.10). John reveals the splendour of this city to us in Revelation 21.2,9-27. Like earthly Jerusalem, the city is connected with a garden. In fact, it's not just a city *in* a garden - the city and the garden are *one*. It's a garden city. The *"river of the water of life"* flows through it; on either side of this river there's *"the tree of life"* (Revelation 22.1-2).

New Jerusalem pictures God's perfect world - a world where God lives with His people in paradise. That world is, quite literally, heaven on Earth. It's nothing less than the Kingdom of God in its final glory.



Image © leniners : Flickr.com (CC BY-NC 2.0)

A stunning view of Pudong, a district of Shanghai, China. But we look for a city *"whose designer and builder is God"* (Hebrews 11.10).

Satan's city

Remember what we said at the beginning of this study. Proud Satan wants to act like he was God here on Earth. And that meant taking God's plans for Earth and trying to bring them to reality himself. And he's using fallen mankind to do it.

God is planning to build a city here on Earth. So Satan became a city planner, too.

Satan began with Cain, *"who was of the evil one"* (1 John 3.12). This man built the first city (Genesis 4.17). It was, in Bernard Bell's words *"an alternative society, a godless society away from God's presence"*.

Cain's city foreshadowed the other city we've met in this session - Babel. Here, proud mankind set out to create a civilisation united in rebellion against God - a counterfeit 'heaven on Earth'.

This city (also called Babylon) makes its appearance at various points through the Bible. At the end of the Bible,



'The Course of Empire: Consummation' painted by Thomas Cole (1801–1848) (The New-York Historical Society.) A vivid depiction of mankind's godless city in all its decadent opulence. This painting, the third of a series of five paintings illustrating the rise and fall of a civilisation, depicts it at its zenith. A great crowd throngs the balconies and terraces of a magnificent city as a scarlet-robed king or victorious general crosses a bridge connecting the two sides of the river in a triumphal procession. The scene suggests the height of ancient Rome. In his newspaper advertisements for the series, the artist quoted these lines from Lord Byron's poem 'Childe Harold's Pilgrimage': "There is the moral of all human tales; / 'Tis but the same rehearsal of the past, / First Freedom and then Glory - when that fails, / Wealth, vice, corruption, - barbarism at last. / And History, with all her volumes vast, / Hath but *one* page" In other words, all human empires go the same way – they begin with great hopes of glory, but grow corrupt and end in barbarism.

we see it as a gaudy prostitute reigning over the kings of the earth (Revelation 17.1-18).

Babylon represents *"this present world"* (2 Timothy 4.10). This city pictures humanistic civilisation that's under Satan's domination (see John 12.31, 14.30, 16.11).

► A TALE OF TWO CITIES ◀

A **picture** of God's kingdom

- **New Jerusalem, God's city**
- **Babylon, Satan's counterfeit city**

The people of Babel began to build a city. It would be a *human* city built through *human* power.

But after God scattered them, He called Abraham. This man looked for a different kind of city. He looked for *God's* city. And so, in Genesis 12, the story of these two cities – mankind's city and God's city - begins in earnest.

At the end of this age, God will judge and destroy mankind's city (see Revelation 18.1-19.4). Then He'll bring His holy city, the New Jerusalem, out of heaven onto earth (Revelation 21.2). God will live together with His people in His new perfect world. God's Kingdom, so long promised and foreshadowed, will finally come in all its glory.

A tale of two offsprings

Straight after the Fall, God told Satan: *"I will put enmity between you and the woman, and between your offspring and her offspring; he shall bruise your head, and you shall bruise his heel"* (Genesis 3.15).

This hostility begins with the serpent and the woman as individuals – *"between you and the woman"*. But their offspring are involved, too; the hostility is also *"between your offspring and her offspring"*.

Who are Satan's 'offspring'? They're described in the Bible as *"the sons of the evil one"* (Matthew 13.38 and compare Acts 13.10) who practise unrighteousness (see John 8.41 and 1 John 3.10). Of course, everyone except Jesus has sinned. But through the Bible, we read about some men and women who have *embraced* sin and wilfully rebelled against God. They're Satan's offspring.

Who are the woman's offspring? They include all God's faithful people through the ages – and that includes us. They're God's offspring.

Through the Bible, we read about these two 'offsprings' – God's offspring and Satan's offspring, *"the children of God, and . . . the children of the devil"* (1 John 3.10). And through the Bible these two offsprings are locked in

There's *"enmity"* between them. It's a life-or-death struggle.

The Offspring Who bruises Satan's head

But the woman's *"offspring"* is also an individual. The Hebrew word translated *"offspring"* (it can also be translated *"seed"*) is *zera'*. Like our English words 'offspring' or 'seed', *zera'* can be singular (a single seed) or collective (a mass of seed). And notice the singular pronouns in the last part of the verse: *"he shall bruise"* and *"his heel"*. These words *"he"* and *"his"* ultimately refer to a single offspring. That offspring is Jesus.

Jesus is the unique *"offspring"* Who *"bruises"* the serpent's Head. And that mortal blow falls on the serpent himself: *"he shall bruise your head"*. The Hebrew word translated *"bruise"* (it can also be translated 'strike', batter') indicates a *repetitive* action. It's a struggle that's been playing out since the Fall and will continue till Jesus comes again. But though their respective *"offspring"* are involved, basically the battle is between Jesus and Satan.

The battle of the ages

Cain and Abel

That battle between the two offsprings began with Cain and Abel. Cain was *"of the evil one"* (1 John 3.12) and murdered his righteous brother, Abel. But God provided *"another offspring"* for Eve – Seth.

Lamech and Enoch

Lamech, the seventh in Cain's line, threatened revenge on any who opposed him. Enoch, the seventh in Seth's line, walked with God. What a difference between these two men! Lamech was one of Satan's offspring. Enoch was one of God's offspring.

Not everyone in Jesus's line of descent, of course, were righteous – far from it. And we meet many righteous people in the Bible who weren't in Jesus's genealogy. But in these two genealogies of Cain and Seth, God is introducing us to a spiritual principle. He's showing us the great conflict between His 'offspring' and Satan's. It's the conflict that lies behind the whole of human history.

The Flood

The battle intensified before the Flood. The *"sons of God"* began to lust after beautiful human girls and marry them (Genesis 6.1-4). As we've argued above, the sin described here threatened to contaminate humanity, and so threaten God's promise of an Offspring Who would *"bruise"* Satan's head. Satan had launched 'total war'. But God stepped in, flooded the Earth, and preserved the human race from eternal ruin.

The Exodus from Egypt

Centuries later, Pharaoh launched another attack on God's offspring. He ordered all the Hebrew baby boys

(Exodus 1.15-22) – all the male *"offspring"* – to be murdered. It was an attempt at genocide. And it would have extinguished Jesus's family line, and brought God's promise of Genesis 3.15 to nothing. But God preserved Moses' life and rescued God's people from Egypt.

The Exile

A thousand years later, Haman plotted to destroy God's people in exile – a story told in the Book of Esther. Again, God's people emerged victorious (Esther 9.1-19).



A spiritual war rages in heavenly places and here on Earth – a war between God's seed and Satan's seed. An American War of Independence battle re-enactment at Fort Ward, Virginia, USA..

Jesus

At the beginning of Jesus's life, Herod tried to kill Him (Matthew 2.16-18). This was only the first of a number of attempts on Jesus's life recorded in the Gospels (see also Luke 4.9-12 and parallels, Luke 4.28-30, John 8.59, 10.31-39).

Satan's offspring in those days included the Jewish religious establishment (though there were many noble exceptions, such as Nicodemus and Joseph of Arimathea). Jesus actually said that the devil was their father. He said to them: *"you seek to kill me, You are doing the works your father did. You are of your father the devil, and your will is to do your father's desires. He was a murderer from the beginning, . . ."* (John 8.40-44). It can be no coincidence that He called the Jewish leaders *"serpents"*, a *"brood of vipers"* (Matthew 23.33, see also 12.34) – calling to our mind the serpent in the Garden of Eden.

The Cross and resurrection

Jesus's crucifixion was the great showdown with Satan. It looked like defeat for God's Offspring. Satan's offspring killed Him.

But Jesus' death wasn't defeat at all. On the Cross, Jesus turned the tables on Satan. He defeated him and all his forces. And He rose again, victorious over all the powers of darkness. He's now *"seated at the right hand of the throne of God"* (Hebrews 12.2).

The Church

And, through Jesus, a vast new family of God's 'offspring' has been born – His Church. We're God's children (Romans 8.14-16). We're His 'offspring'. Now we're in the firing line. Paul tells us: *"Put on the whole armour of God, that you may be able to stand against the schemes of the devil. For we do not wrestle against flesh and blood, but against the rulers, against the authorities, against the cosmic powers over this present darkness, against the spiritual forces of evil in the heavenly places."*

Satan's final defeat

But Satan's power is broken (see 1 Peter 5.8-10). Through Jesus, we are assured of victory. Even before His crucifixion, Jesus announced to His disciples: *"I saw Satan fall like lightning from heaven. Behold, I have given you authority to tread on serpents and scorpions, and over all the power of the enemy, and nothing shall hurt you."* (Luke 10.19). Even then, Satan was in retreat. One day, Satan's defeat will be complete and final. He'll be *"thrown into the lake of fire and sulfur"*. (Revelation 20.10).

► MESSIAH ◀

The **Man** Who brings us into God's kingdom

Genesis 3.15 tells us that a descendant of Eve would crush Satan. Daniel calls this Man *"Messiah"* (Daniel 9.25-26 NKJV). The Hebrew word here is *māshîach*, meaning 'anointed one' (in fact, the ESV translates this *"an anointed one"*).

In the Old Testament, the name *"Messiah"* is found only in this passage in Daniel. But the idea of a Messiah begins right back in Genesis 3.15 and grows stronger and clearer through the Old Testament. We discover that He will save God's people, defeat their enemies, and rule the world in righteousness and justice.

The New Testament reveals Who this Man is. The Greek translation for *māshîach* is Christ (Greek *christos*). The Messiah is Jesus Christ.

God's restraining hand

God typically gives evil time to ripen and reveal itself for what it really is. But God also restrains evil.

We are shocked at the extent of evil. But we would be astonished - and truly grateful - if we knew how much God curbs evil. He slows down mankind's slide into degeneration and rebellion, so He can work out His plan of salvation in its proper time.

God restrains evil in a number of ways. Here's a summary of how He does this.

1 Direct action

God acts directly against evil when it threatens His purposes. He did this with the Flood; later in our journey we'll see Him command His people to destroy the

depraved Canaanites during the conquest of the Promised Land.

2 Reducing mankind's powers

God endowed Adam and Eve with great talents - talents that fallen mankind put to evil use, as well as good. So, in His mercy, God curtailed them.

► The language barrier



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Clean water supply for residents of Lai, Papua New Guinea. This country occupies the eastern part of the island of New Guinea, to the north of Australia. Over 800 languages are still spoken in this country.

God created the Universe by speaking it into being. God's word has limitless power. We're made in God's image; we, too, can speak and communicate. Our gift of speech and communication is finite. But it's still powerful.

After mankind fell, this gift of speech could be abused. Ease of communication allowed easy and swift transfer of ideas. This helped our race to build a sophisticated civilisation in rebellion against God.

So at Babel, God split mankind into different language groups. Each group became isolated and unable to communicate with others. And that slows down the pace of technical, economic and cultural development.

► Infirmary and death

After the Flood, people's lifespan decreased (see Genesis 11.10-32, 25.7, 35.28, 47.28, 50.26) until it reached



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Lycian rock-cut tombs in the form of temple fronts carved into the vertical faces of cliffs at Myra, Turkey. Our lifespan is now only 70 or 80 years – far shorter than that enjoyed by people before the Flood.



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“Cursed is the ground because of you; in pain you shall eat of it” (Genesis 3.17). A patchwork quilt of terraced rice fields in Yunnan, China. A farming method that, though productive, is labour intensive.

around 70 to 80 years at most (compare Psalm 90.10). Shorter lives, disease and old age all curb crime. They also limit how much experience and knowledge anyone can accumulate in their lifetime. And so this narrows the window of opportunity to pass on that understanding to future generations.

If people like Einstein lived at the peak of their powers for hundreds of years, the build-up of wisdom and knowledge in a single person - let alone society at large - would be phenomenal. There would be an explosion of progress on all fronts - technical, social and economic. Such progress, often good in itself, is inevitably also put to malign use. So God acts to repress it.

your face you shall eat bread” (Genesis 3.17-19). Adam and Eve and their descendants faced a struggle to provide the basic necessities of life – food and shelter. It was to be a frustrating and wearisome task, a task that would take the lion’s share of their time and energy. It’s another curb on mankind’s capacity for evil.

3 Capital punishment

After the Flood God commanded Noah and his sons to execute murderers (Genesis 9.5-6). Removing these evildoers from humanity restrained evil. Moses’ Law extended these judicial powers.

► Toil

After the Fall, God said to Adam: *“cursed is the ground because of you; in pain you shall eat of it all the days of your life; thorns and thistles it shall bring forth for you; and you shall eat the plants of the field. By the sweat of*

► Next Session God’s Nation is Born

We trace the journeys of Abraham and his descendants until God rescues His people from Egypt and leads them into His presence at Sinai.

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