

## Journey through the Bible video series 5 ► Cataclysm and Covenant Audio script

### Act 3—the new

The Bible story is a drama in four acts—the good, the bad, the new, and the perfect. We saw this in our first session.

Our previous session was Act 2—the Bad. Adam and Eve rebelled against God. That brought disaster on them and on our world.

We now begin Act 3—the New. In fact, Act 3 covers nearly all the rest of our journey through the Bible.

In Act 3, God does a new thing. Step by step, over thousands of years, God puts right all the consequences of mankind's rebellion.

### Satan's plan

Adam and Eve now lived outside the Garden of Eden. In the words of Jesus Himself, Satan was now **"the ruler of this world"** (John 12:31, 14:30, 16:11).

Satan wants desperately to be like God. He wants to copy God. He wants to do what God intends to do here on Earth.

So what does God intend to do here?

In the beginning, God told Adam and Eve to fill the earth and to subdue it. God commissioned our human race to colonise the whole planet and make it a paradise where God lived amongst us. Earth was to be the place where God's people lived in God's paradise in God's presence.

So Satan began to try to copy God. He wanted Earth to be a place where people lived in his own kind of paradise and in his own presence. Satan dreamed of a global human civilization under his dominion and in rebellion against God.

This painting by a 19<sup>th</sup> century American artist captures something of this dream. It depicts a magnificent city. This city reminds us of the city of Rome in the days of the Roman empire. Vast crowds fill its streets and squares. A scarlet-robed king or military leader crosses a bridge in triumphant procession. It's a vivid depiction of godless civilisation—the very kind of thing that Satan is aiming for here on Earth.

The great question is this: **"Can sinful mankind governed by Satan, really bring paradise to this world without God?"** God will not bring history to a close before this question is fully answered.

So God is allowing Satan to try to unfold his evil plans for this planet. These plans will, it seems, climax in the rule of Antichrist at the end of this age.

But at the same time, God is at work. Through the ages, He's outworking His amazing plan of rescue for this world.

### Cain and Abel

And so human history continued. Eve gave birth to two boys—Cain and Abel.

When they were grown up, each offered God a sacrifice. Abel was a shepherd. He **"brought of the firstborn of his flock, and of their fat portions"** (Genesis 4:4). The firstborn were considered to be the best animals; the fat portion was considered to be the best part of the animal. Abel brought God the best that he could bring. God accepted his offering.

In contrast, Cain just brought **"an offering of the fruit of the ground"** (Genesis 4:3). There's no indication that his offering was the first and best of his crop. It was, it seems, nothing special. God didn't accept his offering.

Cain—seen here on the left of this painting—was furious. God tried to stop him being so angry.

But Cain's anger exploded. He murdered his brother Abel.

God put Cain under a curse. He would now find it difficult to scratch a living from the soil. He would be **"a fugitive and a wanderer on the earth"** (Genesis 4:14)—rootless, without a community to belong to. In a way, it was a fate worse than death.<sup>[1]</sup>

But in His mercy, God placed a mark on Cain. He did this to protect him.

### Cain's city

Cain **"went away from the presence of the LORD"** (Genesis 4:16). He settled in the land of Nod, east of Eden. He built a city. Perhaps he did this to counteract God's judgment on him—to stop being a fugitive and wanderer, to settle down and create a society of his own.

This photo depicts the ruins of an ancient city called Arad. It's in southern Israel. Arad was a tightly packed mass of buildings enclosed by a wall. It was occupied between around 4,300 and 5,000 years ago.

This is far later than Cain's time. However, these ruins do give us some idea of what Cain's city might have looked like.

Cain's descendants mastered the skills of animal husbandry, music and metal-working.

But alongside these cultural advances, there was violence. Cain's descendant Lamech threatened revenge on anyone who opposed him.

### The birth of another offspring

Eve had another son. She called him Seth.

In the last session, we learnt that one of Eve's descendants would crush Satan and defeat him.

That descendant is Jesus Christ. Eve's son Seth was an ancestor of Jesus. God was working out His plan to defeat Satan and rescue this world.

One of Seth's descendants was another man called Lamech. Lamech had a son whom he called Noah. Lamech said about his son Noah, **"this one shall bring us relief from our work and from the painful toil of our hands"** (Genesis 5:29). Lamech longed for a world free from the curse, a world without painful toil.

### The flood of wickedness

But as the human race increased in numbers, sin spiralled out of control. Wickedness flooded the Earth. Genesis 6 verse 2 tells us this: **"the sons of God saw that the daughters of humans were beautiful, and they married any of them they chose"** (Genesis 6:2 NIV). This painting imagines a scene in a Middle Eastern harem. It suggests the kind of thing that was going on.

Who were these **"sons of God"**? There are a number of explanations. It seems most likely that they were evil angels. If so, these angels were having sexual relations with human women. The offspring from such unnatural marriages would have been abnormal. In Genesis 6 verse 4 these offspring are called **"mighty men"**. They were great and famous warriors. It seems likely that they were giants—men of great stature. This painting suggests the kind of people they might have been.

If all this is correct—and it seems the most likely explanation—then these evil angels were degrading the human race.

In the last session, we learned that God promised Eve that one of her descendants would defeat Satan. If our human race was indeed being degraded like this, then Eve's own family line would have been threatened. Her promised descendant might never be born and be the

perfect Human that God needed Him to be to defeat Satan.

Whatever was going on, it's clear that there was wickedness of a particularly horrible, loathsome and perverted kind. It would, it seems certain, have brought our human race totally and permanently under Satan's control.

God would not allow this. He said **"I will wipe from the face of the earth the human race I have created—and with them the animals, the birds and the creatures that move along the ground—for I regret that I have made them."** (Genesis 6:7 NIV).

### The great flood

But there was one man who pleased God. That man was Noah, the son of Lamech.

Noah was a righteous man. He walked with God.

God made plans to save Noah and his family.

God told Noah to build an enormous boat. It was called an Ark. This photo shows a full-scale replica in the Netherlands.

In this Ark, Noah and his immediate family, together with all kinds of animals would be saved from drowning.

The project must have taken decades. But the time came when the Ark was finished. Noah and his family, and all the animals went on board. God Himself shut the door. Then we read that **"all the fountains of the great deep burst forth, and the windows of the heavens were opened. And rain fell upon the earth for forty days and forty nights."** (Genesis 7:11-12). A great flood covered the land. Every person and animal—except those in the Ark—perished. This painting graphically captures that scene of death and destruction.

In our first session we saw that, at the very beginning, this planet was covered by a vast ocean. After the Flood, the land was covered by water again.

Then dry land appeared, just as it did on the third creation day.

It was as if God was creating again. Noah, his family and the animals stepped out onto a new cleansed land.

The flood preserved the human race from being ruined by Satan. It was a new start for mankind.

### The covenant with Noah

Noah offered sacrifices to God. This was an act of thanksgiving and devotion to God. Then God said to Noah: **"I establish my covenant with you: Never again will all life be destroyed by the waters of a flood; never**

again will there be a flood to destroy the earth" (Genesis 9:11 NIV). The sign of that covenant was a rainbow.

This is the first time that we meet this word 'covenant' in the Bible.

'Covenant' means 'binding agreement'. A covenant brings two parties into binding relationship with each other.

God made several covenants with people during Old Testament times. Through these covenants, God—step by step—brought humans back into relationship with Himself. He did this so that people could live in His paradise in His presence.

### A new Adam, a new blessing

Noah was like another Adam, stepping out into a new clean world. God had blessed Adam and Eve. Now God blessed Noah and his sons—Shem, Ham and Japheth.

God had commanded Adam and Eve to be fruitful and multiply and fill the Earth. He now commanded Noah and his sons, ". . . be fruitful and multiply, increase greatly on the earth and multiply in it" (Genesis 9:7).

### Another fall

The Flood brought about a new start for mankind. But people's hearts hadn't changed. After the Flood, God Himself said this: "the intention of man's heart is evil from his youth". (Genesis 8:21).

Sin continued. In Genesis 9 we read this: "Noah began to be a man of the soil, and he planted a vineyard. He drank of the wine and became drunk and lay uncovered in his tent." (Genesis 9:20-21). Noah's son Ham saw his father naked and told his two brothers outside. Then Shem and Japheth took a garment, laid it on their shoulders, and walked backwards and covered Noah. They did this out of respect for their father. They never saw him naked.

What Ham actually did is something of a mystery. Perhaps it was simply that he gazed at his naked father and—with a total lack of discretion—broadcast the fact to his two brothers. This would have been a disgusting act of disrespect. Centuries later, God said to His people: "Cursed be anyone who dishonours his father or his mother." (Deuteronomy 27:16). Ham dishonoured his father.

It was like Genesis chapter 3 all over again. After they sinned, Adam and Eve knew that they were naked. Now Ham saw the nakedness of his father. After Adam and Eve's sin, God cursed the serpent. Now Noah cursed Canaan, the son of Ham.

But why didn't Noah curse Ham himself? Firstly, God had already blessed Ham and his father and brothers. Doubtless that blessing couldn't be reversed. Perhaps, too, Noah saw that Canaan was like Ham. Canaan's descendants were the Canaanites. This is the remains of a pagan Canaanite altar in present-day Israel. The idolatry and depravity of the Canaanites is vividly recorded in the Bible.

But Noah blessed Shem and Japheth, who respected their father.

### The tower of Babel

Sometime after the Flood, people settled in a plain in the land of Shinar. This was in lower Mesopotamia—in what is now roughly present-day Iraq. You can see where it was located on this map.

These people said, "Come, let us build ourselves a city and a tower with its top in the heavens, and let us make a name for ourselves, lest we be dispersed over the face of the whole earth." (Genesis 11:4).

God had commanded the human race to multiply and disperse across the whole Earth and colonise it. But the people of Babel didn't want to be dispersed like that.

And they wanted to make "a name" for themselves. It was sheer egotism.

They began to build "a tower with its top in the heavens". It seems that this was a step-sided tower with a temple at the top. Such a tower is called a ziggurat. This is a picture of an ancient ziggurat. It's in what is now southern Iraq. It was originally built around 4000 years ago—around the same period of history that Abraham lived in. Recently, it was partially rebuilt.

Here's a drawing of a typical ziggurat. Notice the little building right at the top. That's a temple. A ziggurat was dedicated to a pagan god. People believed that if they served that god properly, it would live in this temple.

In other words, a ziggurat was a way to get their god to live among them.

God wanted this world to be a place where His people lived in His paradise in His presence. Now mankind took it into their heads to try and bring this about themselves—on their own terms, and for their own selfish purposes. They wanted to build a strong and secure civilization where their god lived among them. In other words, they wanted to live in a paradise in the presence of their god. But it was a false paradise in the presence of a false god.

We said earlier that Satan's goal for planet Earth was to create a kind of false paradise, a global society under his dominion and in rebellion against God.

The city and tower of Babel was an early attempt to realise this goal.

So God intervened. He confused the people's language so they couldn't understand each other. The language barrier came into being. And God **"dispersed them from there over the face of all the earth, and they left off building the city"**.(Genesis 11:8).

People can't cooperate very easily if they can't understand each other, and if they're living distant from each other in scattered communities.

So the development of technology and civilization slowed down. This hindered Satan's plan for a worldwide civilization under his dominion.

Once again, God changed the course of history. Now He could work out His plan of salvation in His appointed time.

And now God caused mankind to disperse across the Earth. This fulfilled what He had commanded mankind right at the very beginning.

## The call of Abraham

At this point, the Bible introduces us to a man called Abram. God later renamed him Abraham.

The Bible story now zooms in to focus on Abram and his descendants.

Abram lived in a city called Ur, in Mesopotamia. Its most probable location is marked on this map. These are the ruins of an ancient city that's widely believed to be Ur, where Abram lived.

God said to Abram: **"Go from your country, your people and your father's household to the land I will show you. I will make you into a great nation, and I will bless you; I will make your name great, and you will be a blessing. I will bless those who bless you, and whoever curses you I will curse; and all peoples on earth will be blessed through you."** (Genesis 12:1-3 NIV).

Right from the very beginning, God wanted this world to be blessed. Now, through Abram, He begins once more to bring blessing on this world.

The people of Babel wanted to live in a paradise of their own making in the presence of their god. It was a false paradise in the presence of a false god.

Now God was going to bring about the real thing: a true paradise in the presence of the true God—God's people living in God's presence in God's paradise.

God was going to bring all this about through this man Abram. The Book of Hebrews in the New Testament tells us that Abram, **"was looking forward to the city that has foundations, whose designer and builder is God"** (Hebrews 11:10). God showed Abram a city. This city was a complete contrast to the city that the people of Babel tried to build. This city that Abraham saw was God's city. We'll see this city in all its glory at the end of our journey. It's called New Jerusalem. This wonderful city is symbolic. It pictures God's people living in God's paradise in God's presence. God was going to bring this about through Abram.

Abram was another new Adam. Adam was the father of rebellious humanity. Abram would be the father of a new humanity—God's faithful people.

And so what God promised Abram reflects what we read about Adam.

God had placed Adam in a garden. God promised Abram a 'garden'. The land that God was going to show Abram was like a new Garden of Eden—well watered and fertile.

Secondly, God had commanded Adam and Eve to be fruitful and multiply. God promised Abram that *he* would be fruitful and multiply. His descendants would be **"a great nation"**.

Thirdly, God had blessed Adam and Eve. God promised to bless Abram. And through Abram, all the families of the earth would be blessed.

But there's one great contrast between Adam and Abram. Adam had failed to trust and obey God. In contrast, Abram did trust and obey God. He became God's friend.

Abram was a new Adam. Abram's call launched a whole new phase in God's rescue plan for humanity and for this planet.

So Abram left the city of Ur to go to the land that God would show him.

In the next session, we'll trace the story of Abram and his descendants until God rescues His people from slavery in Egypt.

## REFERENCES

[1] This comment is drawn from *The Book of Genesis Chapters 1-17*, by Victor P. Hamilton, page 232. Published by Wm. B. Eerdmans Publishing Co., Grand Rapids, Michigan, in 1990.

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