



Class Notes

Noah to Abraham

Genesis 6-11

Dr. Tim Mackie

Why did God choose to flood the world? There's much to discover in the story of Noah and his descendants, as these chapters develop major themes seen throughout the biblical story. See how the literary design of this movement reveals God's character and informs the covenant promises God makes in response to human rebellion.

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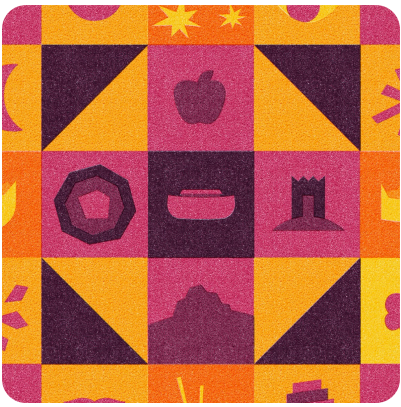
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Module 1: Introduction to the Flood Narrative

SESSIONS 1-6

Before diving into the story of Noah and the flood, consider the literary and cultural context that shapes the story's meaning.

Session 1: How We Read the Flood Story

Key Takeaways

- In order to understand what the biblical authors intend to communicate, the literary, cultural, and historic context of Genesis must take precedence over modern questions and concerns.
- Genesis 1-11 is intricately designed to introduce the themes, vocabulary, and ideas needed to understand the rest of the Hebrew Bible.
- Jesus and his contemporaries assume the three-part organization of the Hebrew Scriptures called the TaNaK.

Reading Ancient Jewish Meditation Literature

The TaNaK as a Composite Unity

Sections	Scrolls
Torah (The Law)	Genesis, Exodus, Leviticus, Numbers, Deuteronomy
Nevi'im (The Prophets)	Former Prophets: Joshua, Judges, Samuel, Kings
	Latter Prophets: Isaiah, Jeremiah, Ezekiel, Hosea, Joel, Amos, Obadaiah, Jonah, Micah, Nahum, Habakkuk, Zaphaniah, Haggai, Zechariah, Malachi
Ketuvim (The Writings)	Psalms, Job, Proverbs, Ruth, Song of Songs, Ecclesiastes, Lementations, Esther [The <i>Megillot</i>], Daniel, Ezra, Nehemiah, Chronicles
<i>Three-Part Collection of the Hebrew Bible.</i> Created by Tim Mackie for BibleProject Classroom: Adam to Noah (2020).	

The Hebrew Bible is a set of ancient Israelite scrolls that were formed into an editorial unity over the course of their composition and collection. Their final shape dates to sometime in the 3rd-2nd century B.C.E.

They were given a three-part macro design, and this order is preserved in modern Jewish tradition and is well attested in Second Temple Jewish texts and in the New Testament.

When Jesus alludes to the order of the Hebrew Bible, he assumes a three-part design, which agrees with other contemporary Jewish authors who also allude to the ordered sections.

Luke 24:44 NIV

... “This is what I told you while I was still with you: Everything must be fulfilled that is written about me in the Torah of Moses, the Prophets, and the Psalms.”

Luke 11:50-51a NIV

⁵⁰ Therefore this generation will be held responsible for the blood of all the prophets that has been shed since the beginning of the world, ⁵¹ from the blood of Abel to the blood of Zechariah, who was killed between the altar and the sanctuary.

Abel was murdered by Cain in [Genesis 4](#), and Zechariah son of Jehoiada was murdered by Joash in [2 Chronicles 24](#), which corresponds to the TaNaK order.

“Many great teachings have been given to us through the Law [= Torah], and the Prophets [= Nevi'im], and the others that follow them [= Ketuvim] ... So my grandfather Yeshua devoted himself especially to the reading of the Law and the Prophets and the other scrolls of our Ancestors.”

Prologue to *The Wisdom of Ben Sirach*.

“The scrolls of Moses, the words of the prophets, and of David.”

Dead Sea Scrolls (4QMMT).

“The laws and the oracles given by inspiration through the prophets and the Psalms, and the other scrolls whereby knowledge and piety are increased and completed.”

Philo of Alexandria, *De Vita Contemplativa*, 25.

Reflection Question

In your experience of reading the flood story, what elements of the story make the least sense to you? What about the narrative challenges you the most?

Session 2: The Flood Story in the Hebrew Bible

Key Takeaways

- The Hebrew Bible is like a family quilt. It is a collection of narratives and poems from all periods of ancient Israelite history that have been curated and assembled into a literary design shape in order to tell a unified story.
- Jesus understood the flood story as a pattern—a theological category to talk about when God overthrows the corrupt power systems of our world.
- The biblical authors designed the stories of Genesis 6-11 to address the main issues of concern at work in the TaNaK, not our modern concerns.

The Hebrew Bible as a Family Quilt

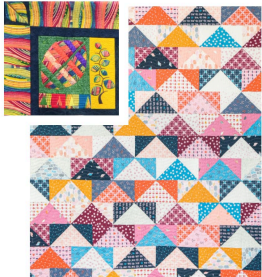


A quilt is made of many preexisting materials, consisting of individual pieces (like the Eden story or the Abraham stories) or sub-collections of pieces (the laws at Mount Sinai, the David stories, or the Psalms) or entire books (like Ruth or Esther). These earlier materials could be incorporated into the collection as they stood or editorially reshaped to fit the new context. But—and this is the key point—it is this new overall context of the final quilt that gives each individual piece its meaning when viewed in light of the whole. Regardless of the meaning of any individual piece outside of or before its incorporation into the quilt, the entire context of the quilt is now the proper frame of reference for understanding every smaller piece.

In the case of Genesis 6-11 (the focus of this class), we must ask ourselves this at every step of our reading: What is the meaning of Genesis 6-11 that is intended by the authors who framed the final shape of the TaNaK, as far as we can discern it? For the authors, Genesis 1-11 formed an introduction to the entire TaNaK, containing the basic themes, vocabulary, and plot elements that would be developed throughout the rest of the collection.

The Many Potential Contexts of the Story of Noah and the Flood

In our modern cultural setting, the Noah story has been made to speak to many topics that the biblical authors did not mean to address. We must be vigilant to distinguish between asking what Genesis 6-11 means within the context of the TaNaK versus what it means for other areas of interest. The difference is one of intention. The biblical authors actually intended the stories to address the main issues of concern at work in the TaNaK, not our modern concerns. Genesis 6-11 may have significance for how we think about other topics in light of the biblical perspective, but we should not mistake this for the meaning of Genesis 6-11 in its native context.

Meaning		Significance		
Genesis 6-11	TaNaK	Introduction to Geology	A Primer on Animal Biology	Ancient Shipbuilding
				
<i>The Meaning Versus Significance of Genesis 6-11. Created by Tim Mackie for BibleProject Classroom: Noah to Abraham (2020).</i>				

Reflection Question

According to Jesus, what is the Hebrew Bible (the Torah, the Prophets, and the Psalms) all about?

Session 3: The Design of Genesis 1-11

Key Takeaways

- To understand a story's meaning, it is crucial to pay attention to its literary design shape.
- Knowing good and evil is about moral discernment and taking the authority to define good and bad by your own wisdom.
- In response to the rebellion of his appointed rulers and the outcry of innocent blood, God will allow the cosmos to sink back into chaos. But in his mercy, he rescues a remnant to share his world with so they can rule on his behalf.

The Story of Noah and the Flood In Genesis 1-11

The Noah story in Genesis 6-11 fits within a larger pattern at work in Genesis 1-11. Chapters 1-5 play out a cycle of themes, and chapters 6-11 replay and develop the cycle.

Unit			Theme
A1	1:1-2:3 Creation of sacred cosmos from chaos waters / human image of God / blessing / fruitful and multiply		Creation and Blessing
	B1	2:4-3:24 Mountain-garden temple / sin, nakedness, curse, exile	Failure
	B2	4:1-16 Next generation sins / brothers divide / firstborn not chosen / curse, exile	Failure of Next Generation
	C1	4:17-26 Adam to Lemek: 7 generations + 3 sons / city of Cain / murder / 70 x 7	Non-Chosen
	C2	5:1-32 Adam to Noah: 10 generations + 3 sons / promise of comfort	Chosen
	B3	6:1-8 Cosmic rebellion in Heaven and Earth: sons of God invade the land, leading to the flood	Cosmic Rebellion
Macro-Design of Genesis 1-11. Created by Tim Mackie for BibleProject Classroom: Adam to Noah (2020).			

Unit			Theme
A2	6:9-9:19 De-creation by chaos waters and recreation / Noah as new humanity / blessing / fruitful and multiply		Re-Creation and Blessing
	B1	9:20-21 Garden vineyard / sin, nakedness	Failure
	B2	9:22-27 Next generation sins / brothers divide / firstborn not chosen / curse, scattering	Failure of Next Generation
		C1 10:1-32 Noah + 3 sons / 7 generations to Peleg / City of Babylon and Assyria / 70 nations	Non-Chosen
	B3	11:1-9 Cosmic rebellion in Babylon: sons of Adam invade the heavens, leading to the scattering	Cosmic Rebellion
		C2 11:10-26 Shem to Abram: 10 generations / 3 sons	Chosen
A3	12:1-9 Abram as new humanity / blessing / fruitful and multiply		Re-Creation and Blessing
Macro-Design of Genesis 1-11. Created by Tim Mackie for BibleProject Classroom: Adam to Noah (2020).			

These symmetrical patterns are created by the dense repetition of key words that signal the thematic arguments at work in the narrative and show important comparisons.

“[T]he episodes culled from Hebraic traditions of early history were conceived in two matching sequences (Genesis 1-6 and 6-11) ... Each one of these sequences describes the manner in which humanity was removed progressively from the realm of God [i.e., the garden of Eden and flood], in which he initiated fraternal (and hence human) strife [i.e., Cain and Abel, Noah’s sons], then divided into tribal and national groupings [Cainite and Shemite genealogies and the Table of Nations], then attempted to restore his divine nature or gain access to the divine realm, but was foiled in this by God [sons of God and Tower of Babel]. In each case, it is the consequence of this hubris which launched God into a decision to focus his relationship with humanity on one person. In the first case [Genesis 6], God destroys mankind, allows it to survive through his choice of Noah, but almost immediately recognizes (*Gen. 8:21*) that His measure was a shade too drastic ... [In the second case,] [d]istressed by man’s repeated attempt to unbalance the cosmological order, and no longer allowing Himself the option of totally annihilating mankind, God finally settles on one individual, uproots him from his own kin, and promises him prosperity and continuity in a new land.”

Adapted from Sasson, Jack (1980). [*“The ‘Tower of Babel’ as a Clue to the Redactional Structuring of the Primeval History.”*](#) KTAV Publishing House. 218-219.

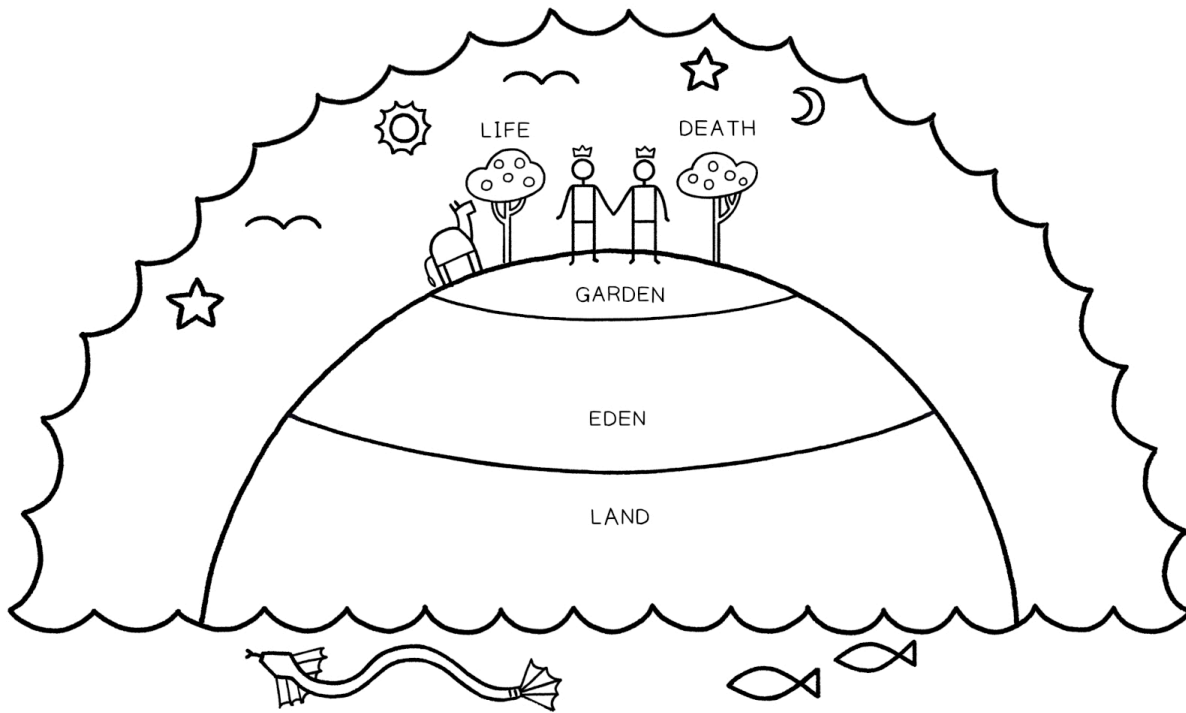
Genesis 1-3 as the Introduction to the TaNaK

“When understood as the introduction to the Torah and to the TaNaK as a whole, Genesis 1-3 intentionally foreshadows Israel’s failure to keep the Sinai covenant as well as their exile from the promised land in order to point the reader to a future work of God in the “last days.” Adam’s failure to “conquer” (Gen. 1:28) the seditious inhabitant of the land (the serpent), his temptation and violation of the commandments, and his exile from the garden is Israel’s story in miniature ... Just as it was in the beginning ... so it will be in the end. In the conclusion to the Pentateuch, Moses presents Israel’s future apostasy and exile as a certainty (see Deut. 30:1-10) ... This inclusion of pessimism at both ends of the Pentateuch with respect to human abilities to “do this and live,” not only supplies the context for interpreting the Sinai narrative, but also provides the rationale for the need of a new work in the “last days,” whereby God will heal the human heart. Moreover, the groundwork is also laid for the expectation of another “Adam” (a future priest king) to arise from among the people of Israel who will fulfill the creation mandate in the last days. In other words, Genesis 1-3 ... forthrightly prepares the reader to expect that Israel will fail its covenant with God, and so to wait expectantly in exile for a new work of God in the last days.”

Adapted from Postell, Seth (2011). [*Adam as Israel: Genesis 1-3 as the Introduction to the Torah and Tanakh*](#). Pickwick Publications.

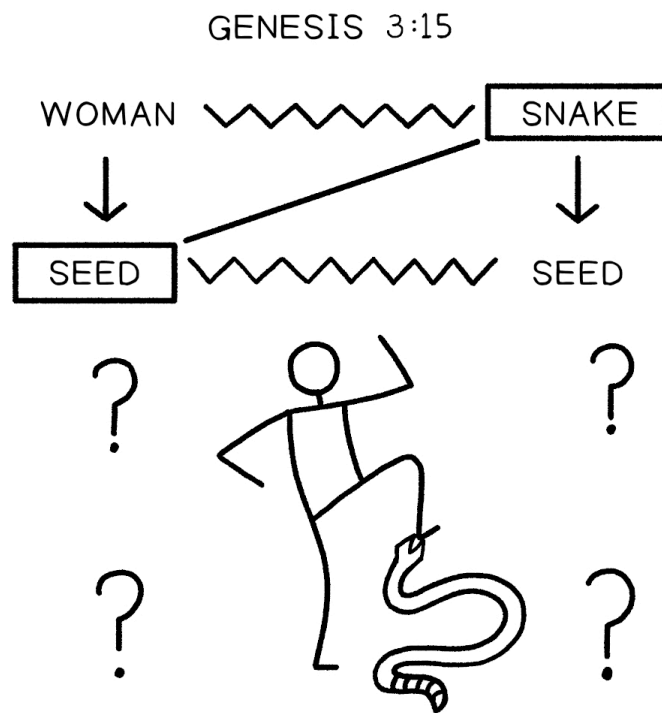
Genesis 1-11 Illustrated

The pattern of themes begins with God’s ideal for creation. Humanity lives at peace with the animals and rules as God’s representatives.



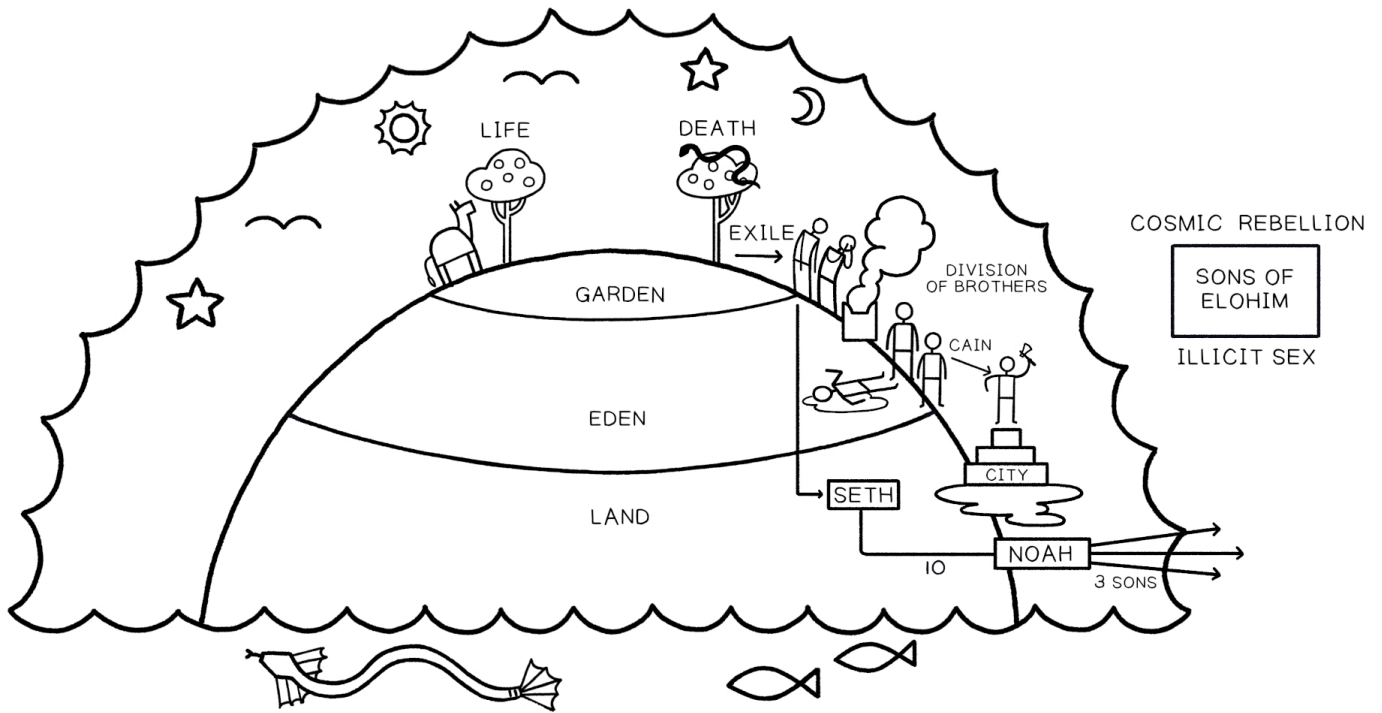
Ideal Creation. Illustration created by Tim Mackie for BibleProject Classroom: Noah to Abraham (2020).

After the failure in the garden, God promises that though there will be conflict between the seed of the woman and the seed of the snake, someday one of the woman's descendants will triumph over the snake.



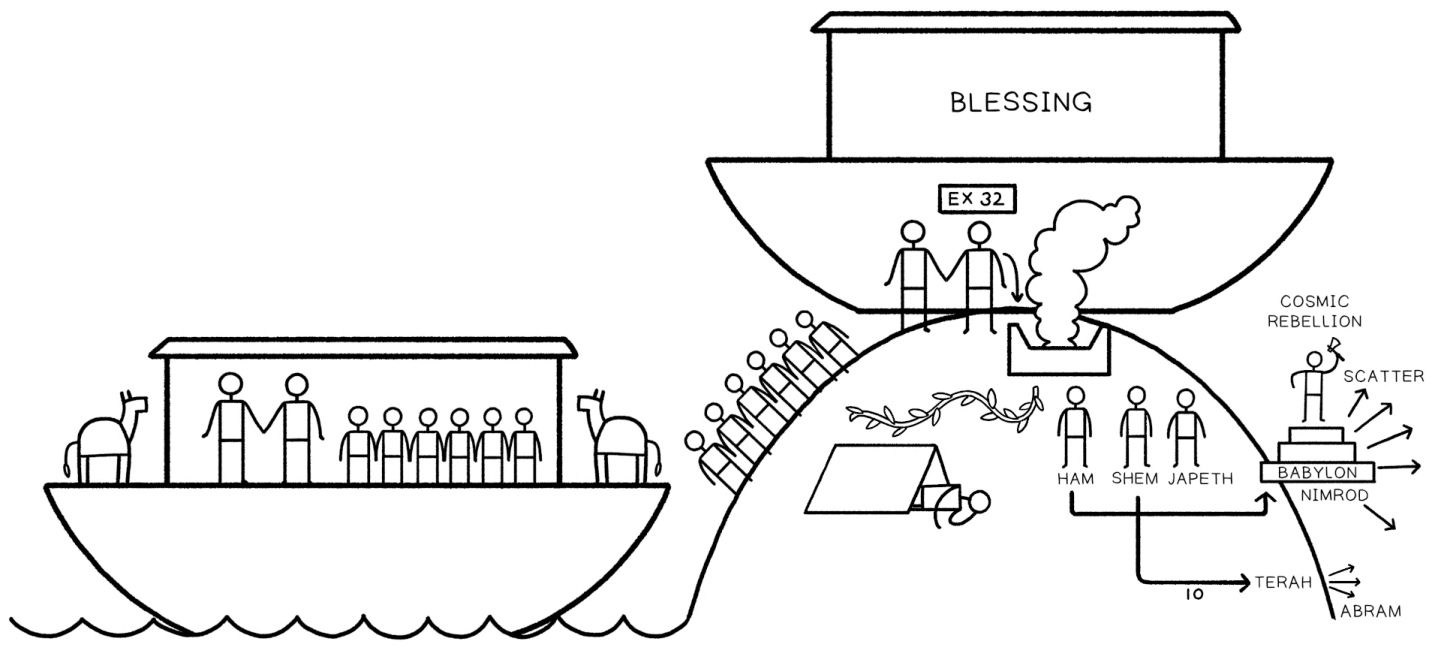
Genesis 3:15 Snake Crusher. Created by Tim Mackie for BibleProject Classroom: Noah to Abraham (2020).

Still, the failure of humanity leads to exile from the garden. The failure and rebellion of the following generations lead to an escalation of violence and bloodshed.



From Adam to Noah's Three Sons. Created by Tim Mackie for BibleProject Classroom: Noah to Abraham (2020).

God's judgment and mercy are bound together as he rescues Noah and his family through the chaos waters of the flood. Noah offers a sacrifice on the high place in response to God's goodness, but the cycle of folly, division, and violence begins anew.



From Noah to Abraham and Nimrod. Created by Tim Mackie for BibleProject Classroom: Noah to Abraham (2020).

Reflection Question

What event from earlier in Genesis does the flood undo?

Session 4: Reflecting on Genesis 1-11

Key Takeaways

- As you study the Bible, pay attention to vocabulary and events that match the themes from Genesis 1-11.
- The biblical story is about anticipating the seed of the woman who will crush the snake to get humanity back to Eden. It tells this story through many micro-stories that develop and enrich the family quilt.



This session has no other notes

Reflection Question

What thoughts or questions do you have about the cyclical pattern of themes in Genesis 1-11?

Session 5: Tale of Two Seeds

Key Takeaways

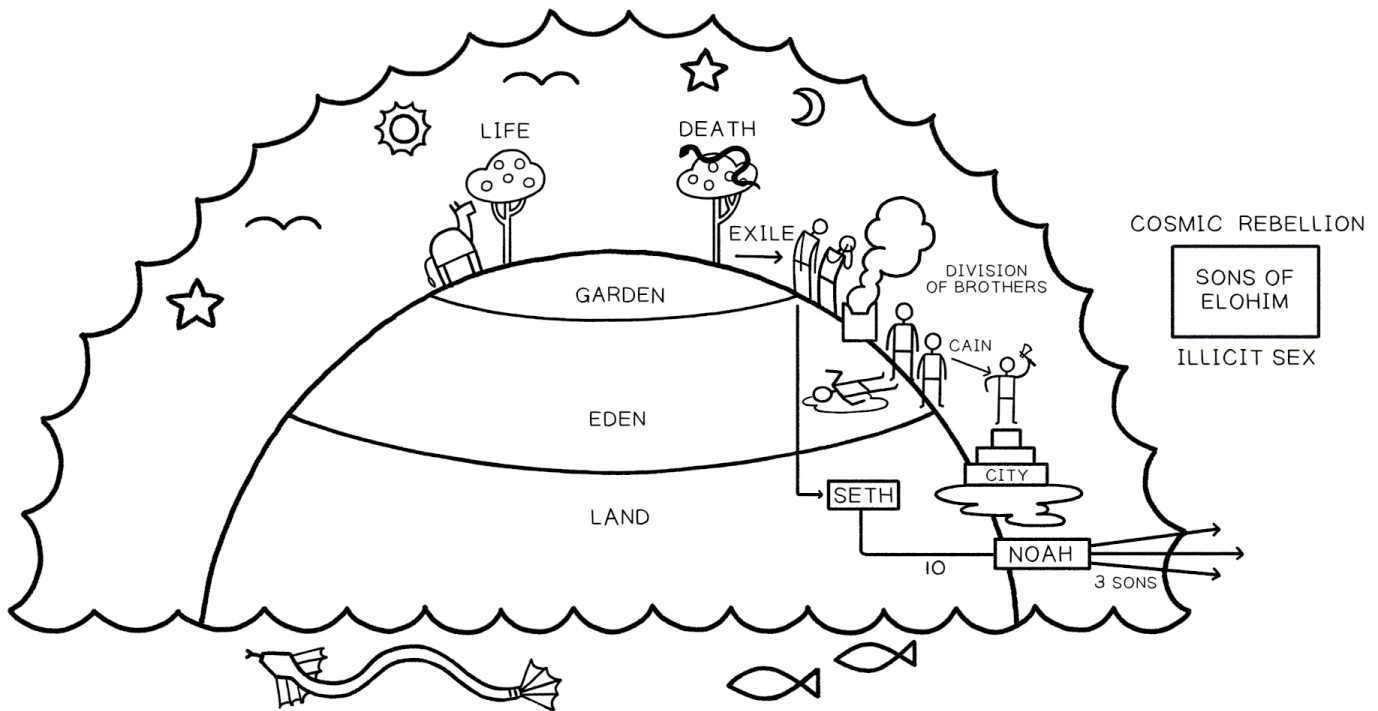
- It is not inevitable that Cain replays his parents' failure. Each generation faces its own testing.
- Genesis 4 and 5 gives us two genealogies, first Cain's and then Seth's—the seed of the snake and the seed of the woman. Cain starts off as the seed of the woman, but by his choices, he aligns himself with the seed of the snake.
- The continuation of Noah's genealogy in 6:9-10, 7:6, and 9:28-29 shows the seams where biblical authors wove two narratives into a unified story.

The Cycle of Themes in Genesis 1-11

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A1	1:1-2:3 Creation of sacred cosmos from chaos waters / human image of God / blessing / fruitful and multiply	Creation and Blessing
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Macro-Design of Genesis 1-11. Created by Tim Mackie for BibleProject Classroom: Adam to Noah (2020).		

Unit			Theme
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Macro-Design of Genesis 1-11. Created by Tim Mackie for BibleProject Classroom: Adam to Noah (2020).			

Genesis 5:1-32: Ten Generations From Adam to Noah



From Adam to Noah's Three Sons. Created by Tim Mackie for BibleProject Classroom: Noah to Abraham (2020).

After the humans are exiled from Eden, and after the drama of election that splits Adam and Eve's family into two lines, the narrative reboots and begins again. This time, the genealogy follows the line of Seth, Cain's line having been concluded with Lemek and sons. This genealogy has a highly schematic form, which makes the three "narrative inserts" stick out.

Literary Design of Each Generation

This genealogy lists ten generations from Adam to Noah. Each one is given in an identical literary form:

And ___ lived ___ years, and he caused the birth of [son's name].

And ___ lived ___ years after he caused the birth of [sons' name], and he caused the birth of sons and daughters,

and all the days of ___ were ___ years,

and he died.

Three Special People in Genesis 5

There are three figures whose genealogical entry deviates from this form, and at precisely these three points we find narrative inserts that highlight important themes of Genesis. Pay special attention to Adam, Enoch, and Lemek/Noah.

¹ This is the scroll of the generations of **Adam** ;
In the day when Elohim created **humanity** ,
he made him as the likeness of Elohim,
male and female he created them,
and he blessed them
and he named them **'human'**
in the day when they were created.

10 Generations

Adam

³ And Adam had lived one hundred and thirty years,
and he caused the birth of one

in his own likeness ,
according to his image ,
and named him Seth .

⁴ And the days of Adam after he caused the birth of Seth were eight hundred years,
and he caused the birth of sons and daughters.

⁵ And all the days that Adam lived were nine hundred and thirty years,
and he died.

Seth

⁶ And Seth lived one hundred and five years,
and he caused the birth of Enosh.

⁷ And Seth lived eight hundred and seven years after he caused the birth of Enosh,
and he he caused the birth of sons and daughters,

⁸ and all the days of Seth were nine hundred and twelve years,
and he died.

Enosh

⁹ And Enosh lived ninety years,
and he caused the birth of Cainan.

¹⁰ And Enosh lived eight hundred and fifteen years after he caused the birth of Cainan,
and he caused the birth of sons and daughters.

¹¹ And all the days of Enosh were nine hundred and five years,
and he died.

Cainan

¹² And Cainan lived seventy years,
and he caused the birth of Mahalalel.

¹³ And Cainan lived eight hundred and forty years after he he caused the birth of Mahalalel,
and he caused the birth of sons and daughters.

¹⁴ And all the days of Cainan were nine hundred and ten years,

and he died.

Mahalalel

¹⁵ And Mahalalel lived sixty-five years,
and he caused the birth of Jared.

¹⁶ And Mahalalel lived eight hundred and thirty years after he became the father of Jared,
and he caused the birth of sons and daughters.

¹⁷ And all the days of Mahalalel were eight hundred and ninety-five years,
and he died.

Yared

¹⁸ And Yared lived one hundred and sixty-two years,
and he caused the birth of Enoch.

¹⁹ And Yared lived eight hundred years after he became the father of Enoch,
and he caused the birth of sons and daughters.

²⁰ And all the days of Yared were nine hundred and sixty-two years,
and he died.

Enoch

²¹ And Enoch lived sixty-five years,
and he caused the birth of Methuselah,

²² and Enoch **walked with God three hundred years**
after he became the father of Methuselah,
and he caused the birth of sons and daughters,

²³ and all the days of Enoch were three hundred and sixty-five years,

²⁴ **and Enoch walked with God ;**
and he was not, for God took him .

Methuselah

²⁵ And Methuselah lived one hundred and eighty-seven years,
and he became the father of Lemek,

²⁶ and Methuselah lived seven hundred and eighty-two years after he became the father of Lemek,
and he caused the birth of sons and daughters.

²⁷ And all the days of Methuselah were nine hundred and sixty-nine years,
and he died.

Lemek

²⁸ And Lemek lived one hundred and eighty-two years,
and he caused the birth of a son,

²⁹ **and he called his name "Noah," saying,**
"This one will give us rest from our work
and from the toil of our hands from the ground
which the Lord has cursed."

²⁰ And Lemek lived five hundred and ninety-five years after he became the father of Noah,

and he caused the birth of sons and daughters,
³¹ and all the days of Lemek were seven hundred and seventy-seven years,
and he died.

Noah

³² And Noah was five hundred years old,
and Noah he caused the birth of Shem, Ham, and Japheth ...

Genesis 5:1-32. Translation and Literary Design by Tim Mackie for BibleProject Classroom Adam to Noah (2020).

Why Enoch, the Seventh From Adam?

Of the three characters with a special narrative insert in the genealogy of Genesis 5, we have the least information about Enoch. But the information we do have connects him to significant themes within the early chapters of Genesis.

- “Enoch” (חֲנוֹךְ) means “dedicated” in Hebrew. The word is used as a verb in Deuteronomy 20:5 and 1 Kings 8:63, which are both about dedicating a house or temple.
- Enoch’s total age surely has symbolic significance: 365 years is the same as a solar calendar year.
- Enoch’s piety is linked to that of Adam and Eve’s in the garden of Eden and sets a pattern for later characters to attain.

Genesis 3:6, 8 NASB*

... and [Eve] took (לָקַח) from its fruit and she ate ...

... and [Adam and Eve] heard the voice of Yahweh walking (מִתְהַלֵּךְ) in the garden.

*Key Words Adapted by Teacher

Genesis 5:22, 24 NASB*

... and Enoch walked (וַיִּתְהַלֵּךְ) with the-Elohim ...

... and Enoch walked (וַיִּתְהַלֵּךְ) with the-Elohim, and he was not, because Elohim took (לָקַח) him.

*Key Words Adapted by Teacher

What Does it Mean to “Walk With God?”

The phrase “walk with God” is used of Noah in Genesis 6:8-9. In 1 Samuel 25:15-16, the phrase is used to refer to friendly and close contact between people.

Genesis 6:8-9 NASB

⁸ But Noah found favor in the eyes of the LORD. ⁹ These are the records of the generations of Noah. **Noah was a righteous man, blameless in his time; Noah walked with God.**

1 Samuel 25:14-16 NASB

¹⁴ But one of the young men told Abigail, Nabal's wife, saying, "Behold, David sent messengers from the wilderness to greet our master, and he scorned them. ¹⁵ Yet the men were very good to us, and we were not insulted, nor did we miss anything as long as **we walked with them**, while we were in the fields. ¹⁶ They were a wall to us both by night and by day, all the time we were with them tending the sheep."

"[T]he meaning of the phrase ... is obvious from 1 Samuel 25:15-16, where it describes friendly everyday conduct with regard to one's neighbors. The [author of Genesis 5] understood the words in the sense that Enoch stood in a direct and immediate relationship to God ... and so was entrusted with God's plans and intentions. This is the starting point for the significance that the figure of Enoch had in a tradition that began early and reached its fullness only in the Apocalyptic literature."

Westermann, Claus (1990). [*Genesis 1-11 \(Continental Commentary\)*](#). Fortress Press. 358.

"With The-Elohim"

Although it is not reflected in English, the word *elohim* in 5:22 and 5:24 has the definite article "the" in front of it (האלהים). The phrase "the-*elohim*" can be used to refer to the single deity Yahweh, and it can also refer to spiritual beings, members of the divine council, or angels (see [Ps. 8:6](#); [82:1, 6](#); [97:7](#); [138:1](#)).

Notice also that in the phrase "for God took him," the word *Elohim* does not have the definite article (כי לקח אתו אלהים). In other words, Enoch walks with the-*elohim* and so *Elohim* takes him.

This distinction seems like an intended and meaningful one: Enoch's life was marked by his friendly and intimate relations with the beings of the spiritual realm (the-*elohim*), and so the chief *Elohim* (named "Yahweh" later in the story) takes him.

This was how the story was universally understood in ancient Judaism (see 1 Enoch, or 2 Enoch).

"And He Was Not, Because God Took Him."

In the middle of a genealogy that focuses on death as the sad curtain closer on God's blessing for life, Enoch's evasion of death in the seventh generation stands out. He is marked as the seventh (= complete) human whose allegiance and union with God results in eternal life.

The word "took" (לקח) is a back reference to [Genesis 2:15](#), where God "took" the human he had created and "rested" (wordplay on Noah's name: וינחהו) him in the garden. Enoch is set on analogy to the human of Genesis 2, that is, Enoch is transferred to the garden of Eden, the realm of eternal life. This is how the earliest interpretation of the Enoch story goes as preserved in 1 Enoch chapters 24-32, where Enoch is taken up in the Spirit and tours the cosmos until he arrives in Eden, the mountain of God.

Notice that the phrase is repeated in 5:22 and in 5:24, which speaks of his "removal." This indicates that Enoch's intimacy with the-*elohim* marked both his 365 years and his translation to another realm.

In a later story modeled after Enoch's divine disappearance, Elijah's departure happens in a similar way and with similar vocabulary.

2 Kings 2:9-11 NASB

⁹ When they had crossed over, Elijah said to Elisha, “Ask what I shall do for you before **I am taken** from you.” And Elisha said, “Please, let a double portion of your spirit be upon me.” ¹⁰ He said, “You have asked a hard thing. Nevertheless, if you see me **when I am taken** from you, it shall be so for you; but if not, it shall not be so.” ¹¹ As they were going along and talking, behold, there appeared a chariot of fire and horses of fire which separated the two of them. And **Elijah went up in a storm to the heavens**.

Psalm 49:15 NASB*

But God will redeem my soul from the power of the grave,
for **he will take me**.

*Key Words Adapted by Teacher

The parallels between Adam and Enoch’s being “taken” to Eden where they “walk with God” and the later design pattern of Elijah’s departure suggest that Enoch is taken to Eden, the cosmic mountain in the skies. This is the primary image of “the heavens” where God’s space and human space are one. This is also how Enoch is portrayed in Jewish literature outside the Hebrew Bible (see 1 Enoch 14, 71 and 2 Enoch).

Noah as the Promised Comforter of Humanity in Genesis 5

Every line of Lemek’s words have significant hyperlinks back to various texts in Genesis 1-3.

The Naming of Noah	Hyperlinks to Earlier Verses in Genesis
Genesis 5:29: And he called his name “ Noah (נח),” saying, “This one will give us comfort (נחם) from our work (מעשה) and from the painful toil (מעצבון) of our hands, from the ground (האדמה) which the Lord has cursed (אררה).”	Genesis 2:15: And Yahweh <i>Elohim</i> took the human and he rested him (וינחהו) in the garden of Eden, to work it (עבד) and to keep it. Genesis 3:17-19: Cursed is the ground (ארורה האדמה) because of you, with painful toil (עצבון) you will eat from it ... until you return to the ground (האדמה), for from it you were taken ... Genesis 3:23: And Yahweh <i>Elohim</i> sent him out from the garden of Eden to work (עבד) the ground (האדמה) from which he was taken ...
<i>The Naming of Noah</i> . Created by Tim Mackie for BibleProject Classroom: Noah to Abraham (2020).	

Lemek’s anticipation of a future descendant who will bring an end to the curse picks up the macro themes of (1) humanity’s exile from Eden and the curse of death and (2) the promise of a coming “seed” who will overcome the snake.

“Noah” (נח) / “rest” (נוח) / “comfort” (נחם): Noah’s name is spelled like the word “rest,” and it rhymes with the first two letters of the word “comfort.”

Through this connection to rest, Noah’s role in the story is previewed and given a theological interpretation. God brings rest and comfort to his world through Noah’s obedient actions and role as the surviving remnant in the flood generation.

Rest (נוח) is a major theological theme in the TaNaK for describing the restoration of Eden conditions on Earth as in Heaven. When God brings rest, it involves restoring a realm of order and sacred space where God can dwell with his people (see Deut. 3:20, 12:10; Josh. 1:13, 21:44; 2 Sam. 7:1, 11; 1 Kgs. 5:18).

Comfort (נחם) is a major theme in the Prophets, especially in Isaiah, and it describes the era of restoration when the failure of God’s people is forgiven, their exile is over, and God renews his covenant with them in a restored Eden.

This points forward to Noah’s crucial act of worship and obedience as he emerges from the ark in Genesis 8:20-22. In the narrative arc of Genesis 2-9, Noah is placed before the reader as an image of the promised seed of Genesis 3:15.

Noah is the righteous seed who passes the test through obedience to God’s will, and he survives as a remnant through the waters of death to offer a precious sacrifice. This qualifies him to become the new humanity at the helm of a renewed creation that lives in a new covenant relationship with its creator.

Introduction to the Flood Narrative in Genesis 6:1-9:27

The flood narrative spans from Genesis 6:1 to Genesis 9:27, and it consists of 15 large literary units made of narrative and poetic materials. The flood narrative has been spliced into the end of Noah’s genealogy, which is now split into two parts in 5:32 and 9:28-29.

It also seems likely that 6:9-10 and 7:6 are a continuation of the genealogy in 5:32 and the natural bridge to the information in 9:28-29, which presents Noah’s total age at 958 years.

Topic	Verses
Genealogy Begins	Genesis 5:21-31 ²⁸ And Lemek lived one hundred and eighty-two years, and became the father of a son. ²⁹ Now he called his name Noah, saying, “This one will give us rest from our work and from the toil of our hands arising from the ground which the LORD has cursed.” ³⁰ And Lemek lived five hundred and ninety-five years after he became the father of Noah, and he had other sons and daughters. ³¹ So all the days of Lemek were seven hundred and seventy-seven years, and he died.
Genealogy with Flood Narrative Inserted. Created by Tim Mackie for BibleProject Classroom: Noah to Abraham (2020).	

Topic		Verses
		And Noah was five hundred years old, and Noah became the father of Shem, Ham, and Japheth ...
	Flood Narrative Begins	Genesis 6:1-8 ¹ When human beings began to increase in number on the earth and daughters were born to them ...
	Genealogy Inserted	Genesis 6:9-10 ⁹ These are the birth-generations of Noah; Noah was a righteous one, blameless in his generation; Noah walked with <i>Elohim</i> ; ...
	Flood Narrative Continues	Genesis 6:11-7:5 ¹¹ Now the earth was corrupt in the sight of God, and the earth was filled with violence ...
	Genealogy Inserted	Genesis 7:6 ... and Noah was six hundred years old when the flood of water came upon the earth ...
	Flood Narrative Ends	Genesis 7:7-9:27 ^{9:27} ... May God enlarge Japheth, and may he live in the tents of Shem; and may Canaan be his servant."
	Genealogy Ends	Genesis 9:28-29 ²⁸ ... And Noah lived after the flood, three hundred and fifty years after the flood. ²⁹ And all the days of Noah were nine hundred and fifty years, and he died.
Genealogy with Flood Narrative Inserted. Created by Tim Mackie for BibleProject Classroom: Noah to Abraham (2020).		

The arrangement of the text gives a clue to its meaning. The flood narrative is a long exposition of Lemek's promise in Genesis 5:29, which itself recalls God's promise in [Genesis 3:15-17](#). Noah is presented as the promised seed of the woman who will undo the curse. The question is, How? The flood narrative is designed to provide the answer.

Reflection Question

Since Adam and Eve had already sinned, do you think the sins of their children, such as Cain murdering Abel, were unavoidable?

Session 6: The Flood Narrative in Ancient Near Eastern Context

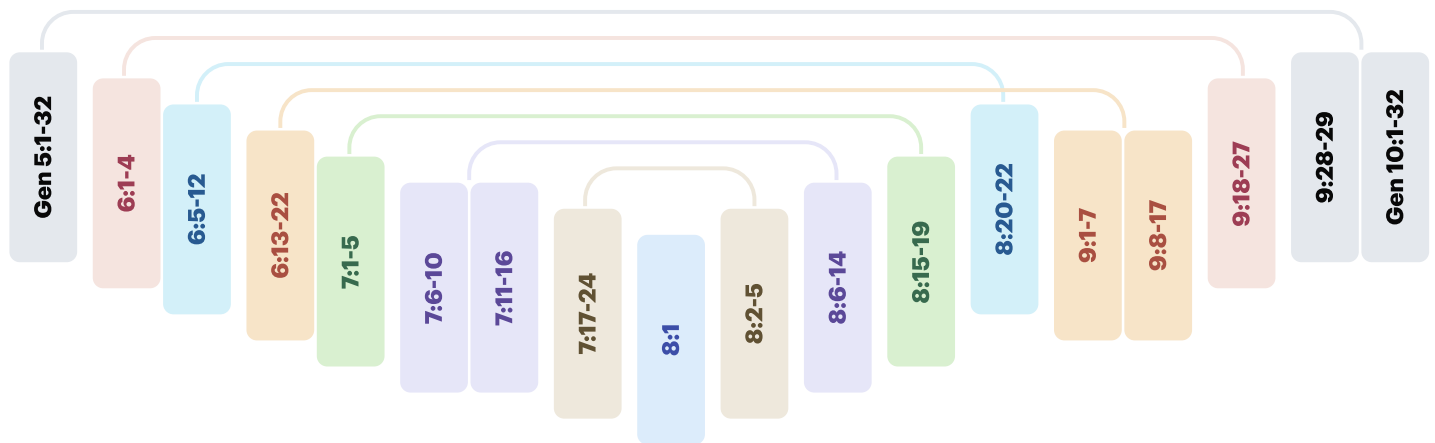
Key Takeaways

- Genesis 8:1 is a pivot from de-creation to new creation.
- The biblical flood story is designed to be in dialogue with the other ancient Near Eastern flood stories.
- The differences between the biblical account and other flood stories outline rival portraits of God.

The Macro-Design of the Flood Narrative

The composition of the flood narrative is complex because it seems to arrange more than one preexisting source (called "J" and "P" by Old Testament scholars). However, all of the preexisting material has been carefully arranged in a symmetrical design with doubled panels so that the story leads up to its climax in a two-step pattern and then roughly retraces the thematic development in reverse order.

The composition of the flood narrative has also been presented as an act of de-creation and re-creation modeled on Genesis 1, and so it has 10 divine speech acts just as in Genesis 1:1-2:3.



Horizontal Macrodesign of the Flood Story. Adapted from Teeter, Andrew (2019). "Genesis Class Notes." By BibleProject for Classroom: Noah to Abraham (2020).

Genesis 6-9						Divine Speeches
6:1-4: The Heavenly Rebellion (Take 1)						#1 - 6:3
6:5-12: The Earthly Rebellion (Take 2)						#2 - 6:7
6:13-22: Divine Speech of <i>Elohim</i> : 1st Warning of Flood (Take 1)						#3 - 6:13
7:1-5: Divine Speech of Yahweh: 2nd Warning of Flood (Take 2)						#4 - 7:1
7:6-10: Flood Begins and Noah Enters the Ark (Take 1)						
7:11-16: Flood Begins and Noah Enters the Ark (Take 2)						
7:17-24: The Flood Overwhelms the Land						
8:1: The Pivot: God Remembers Noah						
8:2-5: The Flood Recedes from the Land						
8:6-14: Noah Sends Out Birds To See if the Waters Have Dried Up						
8:15-19: Divine Speech: Noah to Leave the Ark						#5 - 8:15
8:20-22: Noah's Sacrifice Deals with the Earthly Rebellion						#6 - 8:21
9:1-7: Divine Speech: Blessing and Provision of Food						#7 - 9:1
9:8-17: Divine Speech: The Covenant for the Preservation of Life						#8 - 9:8 #9 - 9:12 #10 - 9:17
9:18-27: The Rebellion of Ham and Noah's Blessing and Curse						
Macrodesign of the Flood Story. Adapted from Teeter, Andrew (2019). "Genesis Class Notes." By BibleProject for Classroom: Noah to Abraham (2020).						

Major Features of the Design of the Flood Narrative

The story begins with a paired unit (6:1-4 and 6:5-12) about the crisis in Heaven and Earth that necessitates the flood. These two units are connected by vocabulary and theme: The inhabitants of Heaven and Earth disrupt cosmic order by violating the boundaries placed on them in Genesis 1-2.

Two Rebellions

The earthly rebellion (6:5-12) describes the ruin of the land and the corrupt condition of humanity that drives God to purify the land with a flood. This language is adopted in the story of Noah's sacrifice after the flood (8:20-22). God decides to change his strategy with corrupt humans by sustaining the cosmic order despite humanity's evil.

The heavenly rebellion (6:1-4) remains in the background of the flood narrative, but its language and themes are picked up in the concluding narrative of Ham's rebellion (9:18-27). Illicit sex and violation of boundaries bind the rebellious sons of *Elohim* to the sons of Ham, that is, the Canaanites.

Two Divine Speeches

The first divine speech warning Noah about the flood (6:13-22) introduces the themes of (1) the construction of the ark, (2) the call to enter it along with all the animals, (3) the promise of a covenant between God and Noah, and (4) the provision of food. The first two themes are developed immediately in following units (building and entering the ark with the animals), but the remaining two themes are not picked up until we come to the symmetrical pairs in 9:1-7 (the provision of food) and 9:8-17 (the covenant).

The second divine speech to enter the ark (7:1-5) corresponds to the first speech (6:13-22), but it differs in that Noah is called to take pure and impure animals into the ark and a timeline is given for the flood. In seven more days the flood will come, and it will rain for 40 days. This speech is paired with its symmetrical partner in 8:15-19, where Noah and the animals are called to leave the ark in precisely the language of their invitation to enter it.

Awaiting and Waiting Out the Flood

The narrative about Noah and the animals entering the ark (7:6-16) happens in two parallel panels, 7:6-10 and 7:11-16. Each unit begins by noting the age of Noah (600 years in 7:6 and 7:11) and how he entered the ark with the animals (the pure ones in 7:8 and the Gen. 1 list in 7:14). These two units match the narrative of Noah's patient waiting for the waters of the flood to dry up (8:6-14). Noah's age is noted again (601 years in 8:13). He employs two birds (one pure and one impure) and waits through multiple stages of seven days.

The description of the flood's arrival and overwhelming power in 7:17-24 leads to the climactic statement that only Noah and those with him in the ark "remained" (7:23). The waters surge until they cover the mountains (7:19-20). Corresponding to this is the multistage recession of the waters in 8:2-5 as the mountains become visible again.

Genesis 8:1 is at the center of the entire unit. God remembers Noah and causes his wind to blow upon the flood waters so they recede.

Here is a more detailed chart highlighting repeated phrases that link symmetrical units in Genesis 6:1-9:27.

Genesis 6-9

6:1-4: The Heavenly Rebellion (Take 1)

- Sons of *Elohim* take daughters of humanity = illicit sex

6:5-12: The Earthly Rebellion (Take 2)

- Human heart is bad / the land is ruined

6:13-22: Divine Speech of *Elohim*: 1st Warning of Flood (Take 1)

- Noah to build the ark
- God is sending flood, but will set up a covenant with Noah
- Noah to enter ark with family and animals, 2 of each kind
- Noah to gather food
- “Noah did all that *Elohim* commanded him” (6:22)

7:1-5: Divine Speech of Yahweh: 2nd Warning of Flood (Take 2)

- Noah to enter ark with his household
- Noah to take pure animals (7 each) and impure animals (2 each)
- In 7 days, rain will come for 40 days
- “Noah did all that Yahweh commanded him” (7:5)

7:6-10: Flood Begins and Noah Enters the Ark (Take 1)

- Noah is 600 years old
- Flood of waters comes upon the land
- Noah and family enter the ark
- Animals come two by two to Noah, into the ark
- “just as *Elohim* commanded Noah” (7:9)

7:11-16: Flood Begins and Noah Enters the Ark (Take 2)

- Noah is 600 years old
- Heaven and deep burst open, rain upon the land
- Noah and family enter the ark
- Pure and impure animals come two by two to Noah, into the ark
- “just as Yahweh commanded him” (7:16a)
- “and Yahweh closed behind him” (7:16b)

7:17-24: The Flood Overwhelms the Land

- 7:17-20: The waters are great and mighty over the land and mountains
- 7:21-22: Everything dies (Take 1)
- 7:23-24: Everything dies (Take 2)
- Noah in the ark is left as a remnant

Macrodesign of the Flood Story Expanded. Adapted from Teeter, Andrew (2019). “Genesis Class Notes.” By BibleProject for Classroom: Noah to Abraham (2020).

Genesis 6-9

8:1: The Pivot: God Remembers Noah

- God causes a wind to blow upon the waters

8:2-5: The Flood Recedes from the Land

- The waters above and below are restrained
- The ark rests upon the mountains

8:6-14: Noah Sends out Birds to See if the Waters Have Dried Up

- Noah sends out the raven (impure)
- Noah sends out the dove 3 times (pure)
- Noah removes the cover and sees the dry land

8:15-19: Divine Speech: Noah to Leave the Ark

- Divine command: Noah, his family, and animals to go out from the ark
- Fulfillment: Noah, his family, and animals all go out from the ark

8:20-22: Noah's Sacrifice Deals With the Earthly Rebellion

- Noah builds an altar and offers a sacrifice
- Yahweh speaks to his heart
- The heart of humanity is bad
- But never again will Yahweh curse or strike the land

9:1-7: Divine Speech: Blessing and Provision of Food

- God blesses Noah: Be fruitful and multiply
- Animals are food for humanity
- No eating the blood, no bloodshed among humans

9:8-17: Divine Speech: The Covenant for the Preservation of Life

- God's covenant with Noah, all humanity, and all living creatures
- Never again ruin the earth by flood
- Sign of the covenant: rainbow in the cloud

9:18-27: The Rebellion of Ham and Noah's Blessing and Curse

- Ham "sees the nakedness of his father" = illicit sex
- Shem and Japheth cover and do not see the nakedness
- Ham is cursed, Shem and Japheth are blessed

Macrodesign of the Flood Story Expanded. Adapted from Teeter, Andrew (2019). "Genesis Class Notes." By BibleProject for Classroom: Noah to Abraham (2020).

The Flood Narrative in Ancient Near Eastern Context

In 1847, Austin Henry Layard discovered near Mosul the first of thousands of cuneiform tablets that belonged to the library of Ashurbanipal (King of Assyria, 7th century B.C.E.).

In 1872, George Smith presented his careful work of bringing together many tablets called the Epic of Gilgamesh ("The Chaldean Account of the Deluge").

"A short time back I discovered among the Assyrian tablets in the British museum an account of the flood ... I had divided the collection of tablets into sections according to subject matter. I have recently been examining the division comprising the mythological tablets and from this section there was a copy of the story of the flood. On discovering these documents, I searched all over the collection of fragments, consisting of several thousand pieces, and I recovered 80 fragments of these legends; by the aid of which I was enabled to restore nearly all of the text of the description of the flood, and portions of other legends as well ... Of the inscription describing the flood, there are fragments of three copies containing the same texts ... All these accounts, together with considerable portions of other mythologies, have, I believe, a common origin in the plains of Chaldea. This country, the cradle of civilization, the birthplace of the arts and sciences, for 2,000 years has been in ruins; its literature, containing the most precious records from antiquity, is scarcely known to us, except from the texts of the Assyrians, but beneath mounds and ruined cities, now awaiting exploration, lay, together with older copies of the flood, other legends and histories of the earliest civilizations of the world."

Smith, George (1873). [*The Chaldean Account of the Deluge*](#) (2). Transactions of the Society of Biblical Archaeology. 213-34.

Hermann Gunkel's *Creation and Chaos in the Beginning and the End* claimed that Genesis 1-11 displayed extensive dependence upon Babylonian traditions.

- Creation from battles with the chaos-water dragon
- Creation of humans from the dust
- Ancient king lists: pre-flood kings living for thousands of years
- Flood stories

In the 20th century, older versions of this Mesopotamian flood story were discovered, bringing it to a total of five separate versions in four languages.

- 16th century B.C.E. Sumerian-Babylonian version: Eridu Genesis
- 17th century B.C.E. Akkadian version: Epic of Atrahasis
- 13th century B.C.E. Akkadian version in the Epic of Gilgamesh
- The biblical version, dated anywhere from the 12th-6th century B.C.E.
- 3rd century B.C.E. Greek version preserved in the writings of the Babylonian priest Berossus

These versions are all descendants of a common ancestor, as they share a unique list of similarities in detail. In all of these stories, we see the following similarities and differences.

The Common Framework Between All Three Accounts

- A divine decision is made to send a punishing flood
- One chosen man is told to save himself, his family, and creatures by building a boat
- The boat's proportions and design imitate a sacred temple
- A great flood destroys the rest of the people
- The boat runs aground on a mountain
- Birds are sent out to determine the availability of habitable land
- The hero offers a sacrifice to the gods
- Humanity is renewed on the land

Tsumura, David Toshio (1994). "Genesis and Ancient Near Eastern Stories of Creation and Flood." *I Studied Inscriptions from Before the Flood: Ancient Near Eastern, Literary, and Linguistic Approaches to Genesis 1-11*. Eisenbrauns. 54-55.

Similarities Between Genesis and Tablet 11 of the Gilgamesh Epic

Narrative Motif	Genesis Flood Story	Gilgamesh Epic, Tablet 11
Divine decision to destroy humanity	Gen. 6:6	Lines 14-19
Warning to the flood hero	Gen. 6:13	Lines 20-23
Divine command to build an ark with dimensions given	Gen. 6:14-21	Lines 24-31
Hero complies with the command	Gen. 6:22	Lines 32-85
Command to board the ark	Gen. 7:1-4	Lines 86-88
Hero boards the ark with family and animals	Gen. 7:5-16	Lines 89-93
Closing of the door of the ark	Gen. 7:16	Line 93
Description of the flood	Gen. 7:17-24	Lines 96-128
Destruction of life	Gen. 7:21-23	Lines 133
Conclusion of the storm	Gen. 8:1-3	Lines 129-131
Adapted from Wenham, Gordon (1978). "The Coherence of the Flood Narrative." <i>Vetus Testamentum, Volume 28 (July)</i> . 346-347.		

Narrative Motif	Genesis Flood Story	Gilgamesh Epic, Tablet 11
Ark runs aground on a mountain	Gen. 8:4	Line 140-144
Hero opens a window	Gen. 8:6	Line 135
Sending out of the dove and raven	Gen. 8:6-12	Lines 145-154
Hero exits the ark	Gen. 8:15-19	Line 155
Hero offers a sacrifice	Gen. 8:20	Lines 155-158
Deity smells sacrifice	Gen. 8:21-22	Lines 159-161
Deity blesses flood hero	Gen. 9:1-3	Lines 189-196
Adapted from Wenham, Gordon (1978). "The Coherence of the Flood Narrative." <i>Vetus Testamentum</i> , Volume 28 (July). 346-347.		

Key Differences Between the Mesopotamian Accounts and Genesis

Mesopotamian Flood Stories	Genesis Flood Story
The gods grow tired of the noise and disorder of humanity, and make a rash decision (that some gods regret!) to destroy them with the flood	God hears the outcry that results from humanity's moral corruption and violence, and sees their inclination to ruin his world
The assembly of gods tries to conceal the flood plan from the humans	Absent
The chief god decrees total human destruction; only one hero is saved by a rebel deity who secretly informs him about the coming threat <i>Eridu Genesis</i> : Ziusudra <i>Atrahasis</i> : Atrahasis <i>Gilgamesh Epic</i> : Uta-napishti	God views Noah as the only faithful human and initiates in warning him and instructing for his safety
Key Differences Between Flood Stories. Created by Tim Mackie for BibleProject Classroom: Noah to Abraham (2020).	

Mesopotamian Flood Stories	Genesis Flood Story
The duration of the flood is either 7 days (Atrahasis, Babylonian) or 6 days and nights (Gilgamesh Epic).	God offers 7 days' warning, followed by 40 days of storm, followed by 150 days of recession, followed by multiple stages of 7 days until the flood is over 1 year and 10 days from its beginning (Gen. 7:11; 8:14).
The scope of destruction varies in the accounts: • Atrahasis: total destruction is ordered by the gods • Gilgamesh: all people turn back into clay, though the tops of the mountains are still visible	All the high mountains were covered (Gen. 7:19-20), there was water over all the surface of the land.
The inhabitants of the boat include a pilot and craftsmen, and lots of animals	Noah and his family and pairs of animals
The gods are hungry after 7 days of no food, and swarm around the sacrifice	Noah's sacrifice is pleasing to God but not to satisfy divine hunger; rather it is an act of thanks
The gods establish a "sign": a female goddess dons a shiny blue necklace that reminds the gods to never bring the flood again	God establishes a sign of the covenant (rainbow) to remind humans of God's promise: the humans are obligated to not shed blood (Gen. 9:4-6)
The flood hero is given divine life and becomes a demi-god king (Ziusudra), or is invited to Mt. Dilmun, the eternal realm of the gods (Uta-napishti)	Noah receives the new-humanity commission, but he immediately fails in his own garden
<i>Key Differences Between Flood Stories.</i> Created by Tim Mackie for BibleProject Classroom: Noah to Abraham (2020).	

Gordon Wenham outlines three basic approaches to explaining these connections in *Word Biblical Commentary, Volume 1: Genesis 1-15* (Wenham, 1987).

1. Minimalists: The differences are too great to suppose direct dependence of the Genesis account on the Mesopotamian. Both are independent developments of an earlier common tradition.
2. Maximalists: The author of Genesis was familiar with and dependent upon Mesopotamian traditions in something like their present form. The writer is therefore deliberately opposing, subverting, or expanding on them.
3. Moderates: The truth lies somewhere between the minimalist and maximalist, depending on the specific motif or textual detail.

“Everyone in the ancient Near East knew there was a great flood (just like everyone today knows there was a Holocaust.) It is in the cultural river. The question was, what was God up to? Why did he send the flood? On this point, different texts offer vastly different interpretations, and every culture gave the tradition its own shape. The Mesopotamian accounts are drawing out of the cultural river and spinning it according to their cultural ideas and theology. The biblical authors are doing the same. We need not concern ourselves with whether the Israelite authors had access to copies of the Mesopotamian accounts ... What is important is the difference in the interpretation of the event. Here there are noticeable differences between the ancient Near Eastern accounts, and the biblical account has a vastly different interpretation to offer.”

Longman, Tremper and Walton, J. H. (2018). [*The Lost World of the Flood: Mythology, Theology, and the Deluge Debate*](#). IVP Academic. 62-63.

Flood Accounts From the Ancient Mesopotamian World

Gilgamesh Epic, Tablet 11

Language: Akkadian / Date: roughly 18th century B.C.E.

"Gilgamesh spoke to Utnapishtim ...

'Tell me, how is it that you stand in the assembly of the Gods, and have found life?'

Utnapishtim said to him, to Gilgamesh,

'Let me reveal to you, O Gilgamesh, a hidden matter,

And a secret of the gods let me tell you.

Shuruppak, a city you know of,

[And which on] Euphrates [bank] is situate,

That city was ancient and the gods were within it.

The great gods resolved to send the deluge.

They [sw]ore their father Anu,

Their counselor the warrior Enlil,

Their throne-bearer Ninurta,

Their canal-officer Ennugi,

The leader Ea was under oath with them.

He repeated their plans to the reed hut,

"Reed hut, reed hut, wall, wall!

Listen reed hut, be mindful, wall!

Man of Shuruppak, son of Ubartutu,

Destroy this house, build a ship,

Forsake possessions, seek life,

Build an ark and save life.

Take aboard ship seed of all living things.

The ship which you shall build,

Let her dimensions be measured off.

Let her width and length be equal,

Roof her over like a hidden depth."

I understood full well, I said to Ea my lord,

"[Your command], my lord, which you spoke just so,

I shall faithfully execute ..."

On the fifth day I laid her framework,

One full acre was her floor space,

Ten dozen cubits each was the height of her walls,

Ten dozen cubits each were the edges around her.

I laid out her contours, I sketched out her lines,

I decked her in six,

I divided her in seven,

Her interior I divided nine ways.

I drove the water plugs into her,

I saw to the spars and laid in what was needful.

Thrice 3,600 measures of pitch I poured in the oven,

Thrice 3,600 measures of tar did [I pour out] inside her.

Thrice 3,600 measures of oil for the workers who carried the baskets,

Aside from the 300 measures of oil that the caulking consumed,

And twice 3,600 measures of oil that the boatmen stored away.

For the [builders] bullocks were slaughtered,

And I killed sheep every day,
Fine beer, [grape] wine, oil and date wine,
[Did I give] the workers [to drink] like drinking water,
They made a feast as on New Year's Day.
[I opened (?)] ointment, dispensed [it] with my own hand.
On the seventh day (?) the ship was completed ...

What silver I had I loaded upon her,
What gold I had I loaded upon her,
What living creatures I had I loaded upon her.
I made go aboard all my family and kin,
Beasts of the steppe, wild animals of the steppe, all skilled craftsmen I made go on board.
Shamash set for me an appointed time:
"In the morning when it spates in cakes,
In the evening when it rains in grain,
Go into your ship, batten the door!"
That appointed time arrived,
In the morning spates in cakes,
In the evening rain in grain,
I gazed upon the appearance of the storm, the storm was frightful to behold!
I went into the ship and battened my door,
To the caulker of the ship, to Puzur-Amurri, the boatman,
I gave (away my) palace, with all its possessions.
At the first glimmer of dawn,
A black cloud rose up from the horizon,
Inside [the cloud] Adad was thundering ...

Adad's awesome power passed over the heavens,
Whatever was light he turned into darkness.
[He smote ...] the land, it shattered like a pot!
For one day the storm wind [],
Swiftly it blew, [the flood came] forth,
It was passing over the people like a battle.
No one could see his neighbor,
Nor could the people see each other in the downpour.
The gods became frightened of the deluge,
They shrank back and went up to Anu's highest heaven.
The gods cowered like dogs, crouching outside,
Ishtar screamed like a woman in childbirth,
And sweet-voiced Belet-[ili] moaned aloud:
"Would that day had turned to nought,
When I spoke up for evil in the assembly of the gods!
How could I have spoken up for evil in the assembly of the gods,
And spoken up for an assault to the death against my people?
It was I myself who bore my people!
(Now) like fish spawn they choke up the sea!"

The Anunna-gods were weeping with her,
The gods sat where they were (?), weeping.
Their lips were parched (?), taking on a crust.
Six days and [seven] nights
The wind continued, the deluge and windstorm leveled the land.
When the seventh day arrived, the windstorm and deluge left off their assault,
Which they had launched, like a fight to the death. The sea grew calm, the tempest grew still, the deluge
ceased.
I looked at the weather, stillness reigned,
And all of mankind had turned into clay.
The landscape was flat as a terrace.
I opened the hatch, daylight fell upon my face.
Crumpling over, I sat down and wept,
Tears running down my face.
I beheld the edges of the world, bordering the sea,
At twelve times sixty leagues a mountain rose up.
The boat rested on Mount Nimush,
Mount Nimush held the boat fast, not allowing it to move.
One day, a second day Mount Nimush held the boat fast, not allowing it to move.
A third day, a fourth day Mount Nimush held the boat fast, not allowing it to move.
A fifth day, a sixth day Mount Nimush held the boat fast, not allowing it to move.
When the seventh day arrived,
I released a dove to go free,
The dove went and returned,
No landing place came to view, it turned back.
I released a swallow to go free,
The swallow went and returned,
No landing place came to view, it turned back.
I sent a raven to go free,
The raven went forth, saw the ebbing of the waters,
It ate, circled, left droppings, did not turn back.
I released (all) to the four cardinal points,
I set up an offering stand on the top of the mountain.
Seven and seven cult vessels I set out,
I heaped reeds, cedar, and myrtle in their bowls.
The gods smelled the savor,
The gods smelled the sweet savor,
The gods crowded around the sacrificer like flies.
As soon as Belet-ili arrived,
She held up the great fly-ornaments that Anu had made her in his infatuation,
"O these gods here, as surely as I shall not forget this lapis on my neck,
I shall be mindful of these days, and not forget, forever!
Let the gods come to the offering,
But Enlil must not come to the offering,
For he, unreasoning, brought on the deluge,

And reckoned my people for destruction!"
Suddenly, as Enlil arrived,
He saw the boat, Enlil became angry,
He was filled with fury at the gods.
"Who came out alive?"
No man was to survive destruction!"
Ninurta made ready to speak, and said to the warrior Enlil,
"Who but Ea could devise such a thing?
For Ea alone knows every craft."
Ea made ready to speak, and said to the warrior Enlil,
"You, O warrior, are the sage of the gods,
How could you, unreasoning, have brought on the deluge?
Impose punishment on the sinner for his sin, on the transgressor for his transgression,
(But) be lenient, lest he be cut off, bear with him, lest he fall.
Instead of your bringing on the flood, would a lion had risen up to diminish mankind!
Instead of your bringing on the flood, would a wolf had risen up to diminish mankind!
Instead of your bringing on the flood, would a famine had risen up for the land to undergo,
Instead of your bringing on the flood, would pestilence had risen up for mankind to undergo!
I was not the one who disclosed the secret of the great gods,
I made Atra-hasis see a dream, he heard a secret of the gods.
Now then, make some plan for him."
Then Enlil came up into the ship,
Leading me by the hand, he brought me up too.
He took my wife up and made her kneel beside me,
He touched our brows, stood between us and blessed us,
"Hitherto Utnapishtim has been a human being,
Now Utnapishtim and his wife shall become like us gods,
Utnapishtim shall dwell afar-off at the source of the rivers."
Thus it was they took me afar-off and made me dwell at the source of the rivers."
Halla, William W. and Younger, K. Lawson (1997). [*The Context of Scripture, Volume 1: Canonical Compositions from the Biblical World*](#). Brill Academic Publishers.

The Atrahasis Epic

Language: Akkadian / Date: roughly 18th century B.C.E.

Atrahasis made ready to speak,
And said to his lord:
"Make me know the meaning [of the dream],
[] let me know, that I may look out for its consequence."
(15) [Enki] made ready to speak,
And said to his servant:
"You might say, 'Am I to be looking out while in the bedroom?'
Do you pay attention to message that I speak for you:
(20) 'Wall, listen to me!
Reed wall, pay attention to all my words!
Flee the house, build a boat,
Forsake possessions, and save life.
(25) The boat which you build,
[] be equal []

[gap]

Roof her over like the depth,
(30) So that the sun shall not see inside her,
Let her be roofed over fore and aft.
The gear should be very strong,
The pitch should be firm, and so give (the boat) strength.
I will shower down upon you later
(35) A windfall of birds, a spate (?) of fishes.'
He opened the water clock and filled it,
He told it of the coming of the seven-day deluge.
Atrahasis received the command,
He assembled the elders at his gate.
(40) Atrahasis made ready to speak,
And said to the elders:
"My god [does not agree] with your god,
Enki and [Enlil] are constantly angry with each other.
They have expelled me from [the land (?)].
(45) Since I have always revered [Enki],
[He told me] this.
I can[not] live in []
Nor can I [set my feet on] the earth of Enlil.
[I will dwell (?)] with god in (?) the depths."
(50) "[This] he told me [] ..."
[gap of four or five lines]

(ii 10) The elders []
The carpenter [carried his axe],
The reed-worker [carried his stone].
[The rich man? carried] the pitch,
The poor man [brought the materials needed].

[gap]

Bringing []

(ii 30) Whatever he [had]

Whatever he had []

Pure (animals) he sl[aughtered, cattle] ...

Fat (animals) [he killed, sheep (?)] ...

He chose and brought on] board.

(ii 35) The [birds] flying in the heavens,

The cattle (?) [and of the cat]tle god,

The [creatures (?)] of the steppe,

[] he brought on board

[]...

(ii 40) [] he invited his people

[] to a feast.

[] his family he brought on board.

While one was eating and another was drinking,

(ii 45) He went in and out; he could not sit, could not kneel,

For his heart was broken, he was retching gall.

The outlook of the weather changed,

Adad began to roar in the clouds.

(ii 50) The god they heard, his clamor.

He brought pitch to seal his door.

By the time he had bolted his door,

Adad was roaring in the clouds.

The winds were furious as he set forth,

(ii 55) He cut the mooring rope and released the boat.

[four lines lost]

(iii 5) [] the storm

[] were yoked

[Anzu rent] the sky with his talons,

[He] the land

(iii 10) And broke its clamor [like a pot].

[] the flood [came forth],

Its power came upon the peoples [like a battle].

One person did [not] see another,

They could [not] recognize each other in the catastrophe.

(iii 15) [The deluge] bellowed like a bull,

The wind [resound]ed like a screaming eagle.

The darkness [was dense], the sun was gone,

[] ... like flies

(iii 20) [the clamor (?)] of the deluge ...

Hallo, William W. and Younger, K. Lawson (1997). [*The Context of Scripture, Volume 1: Canonical Compositions from the Biblical World*](#). Brill Academic Publishers.

Eridu Genesis

Language: Sumerian / Date: 17th century B.C.E.

And as Ziusudra stood there beside it, he [went on he]aring:

“Step up to the wall to my left and listen!

Let me speak a word to you at the wall

[and may you grasp] what [I] say,

May you he[ed] my advice!

By our hand a flood will sweep over

(the cities of) the half-bushel bas[kets, and the country;]

[the decision,] that mankind is to be destroyed,

has been made.

a verdict, a command of the assemb[ly

cannot be revoked,]

(100´) an order of An and En[lil is not known

ever to have been countermanded,]

their kingship, their term, [has been uprooted

they must bethink themselves of that]

Now [...] What I ha[ve to say to you ...”] [...]

[Gap: Lost account of Enki’s advice to build a boat and load it with pairs of living things and Ziusudra’s compliance.]

All the evil winds, all stormy winds gathered into one and with them, then, the Flood was sweeping over (the cities of)

the half-bushel baskets

for seven days and seven nights.

After the flood had swept over the country,

after the evil wind had tossed the big boat about on the great waters,

the sun came out spreading light over heaven and earth.

Ziusudra then drilled an opening in the big boat.

and the gallant Utu sent his light

into the interior of the big boat.

(140´) Ziusudra, being the king,

stepped up before Utu kissing the ground (before him).

The king was butchering oxen, was being lavish with the sheep

[barley cak]es, crescents together with [...]

[...] he was crumbling for him [...]

[juniper, the pure plant of the

mountains] he filled [on the fire]

and with a [...] clasped to

[the breast he ...] [...]

[Gap: Lost account of Enlil’s wrath at finding survivors and his mollification by Enki.]

“You here have sworn

by the life’s breath of heaven

the life’s breath of earth

that he verily is allied with you yourself;

you there, An and Enlil,
have sworn by the life's breath of heaven,
the life's breath of earth,
that he is allied with all of you.
He will disembark the small animals
that come up from the earth!"

Ziusudra, being king,
stepped up before An and Enlil
kissing the ground,
And An and Enlil after hono[ring him]
(180') were granting him life like a god's,
were making lasting breath of life, like a god's,
descend into him.

That day they made Ziusudra,
preserver, as king, of the name of the small
animals and the seed of mankind,
live toward the east over the mountains
in Mount Dilmun.

Hallo, William W. and Younger, K. Lawson (1997). [*The Context of Scripture, Volume 1: Canonical Compositions from the Biblical World*](#). Brill Academic Publishers.

The Babylonica of Berossus

Language: Greek / Date: 3rd century B.C.E.

[54] Kronos appeared to Xisuthrus in a dream and revealed that on the fifteenth of the month Daisios mankind would be destroyed by a great flood. He then ordered him to bury together all the tablets, the first, the middle, and the last, and hide them in Sippar, the city of the sun. Then he was to build a boat and board it with his family and best friends. He was to provision it with food and drink and also to take on board wild animals and birds and all four-footed animals. Then when all was prepared, he was to make ready to sail. If asked where he was going, he was to reply, "To the gods, to pray that all good things will come to man." He did not stop working until the ship was built. Its length was five stades (one kilometer) and its breadth two (400 m). He boarded the finished ship, equipped for everything as he had been commanded, with his wife, children, and closest friends.

After the waters of the Great Flood had come and quickly left, Xisuthrus freed several birds. They found neither food nor a place to rest, and they returned to the ship. After a few days, he again set free some other birds, and they too came back to the ship, but they returned with claws covered with mud. Then later for a third time he set free some other birds, but they did not return to the ship.

[55] Then Xisuthrus knew that the earth had once again appeared.

He broke open a seam on a side of the ship and saw that the ship had come to rest on a mountain. He disembarked, accompanied by his wife and his daughter together with the steersman. He prostrated himself in worship to the earth and set up an altar and sacrificed to the gods.

After this, he disappeared together with those who had left the ship with him. Those who remained on the ship and had not gone out with Xisuthrus, when he and those with him had disembarked, searched for him and called out for him by name all about. But Xisuthrus from then on was seen no more, and then the sound of voice that came from the air gave the instruction that it was their duty to honor the gods and that Xisuthrus, because of the great honor he had shown the gods, had gone to the dwelling place of the gods and that his wife and daughter and the steersman had enjoyed the same honor.

The voice then instructed them to return to Babylonia to go to the city of Sippar, as it was fated for them to do, to dig up the tablets that were buried there and to turn them over to mankind. The place where they had come to rest was the land of Armenia. After they understood all this, they sacrificed to the gods there and went on foot to Babylonia.

To this day a small part of the ship that came to rest in Armenia remains in the Gordyenian Mountains in Armenia and some people go there and scrape off pieces of pitch to keep them as good luck charms.

[56] And those who had arrived in Babylonia dug up the tablets in the city of Sippar and brought them out. They built many cities and erected temples to the gods and again renewed Babylonia.

Burstein, Stanley (1978). [*The Babyloniaca of Berossus*](#). Undena Publications.

Online Concordance Guide

Here are some online resources that will help you see where repetitions occur in the original language.

Biblehub.com

Using <https://biblehub.com/> Biblehub.com is not always intuitive, but it's pretty easy once you learn how to do it. Here are the steps to pull up an interlinear version of the Bible that shows the English next to the Greek or Hebrew.

1. Type in a verse reference in the main top search bar.
2. Once your verse is pulled up, you can read it in many translations.
3. Find and click "Interlin" in the gray bar near the top of the page, and you'll see the verse listed in:
 - Strong's numbers
 - Transliteration
 - Greek/Hebrew/Aramaic
 - Translation
 - Grammar information
4. If you want to search on the original language word to see all the other times it occurs so you can perform your own word study, click on the blue transliteration hyperlink above the original language.
5. You'll see information about the word as well as the total number of times it occurs in the Bible. Click on the hyperlink "Occurrences" and you will find a complete list of verses that contain that word.

Stepbible.org

<https://www.stepbible.org/> Stepbible.org is intuitive and really easy to use. Here are the steps to conduct word study searches.

1. Type the biblical book/verse reference into the search bar.
2. You will see your text with all of the main words in hyperlink blue. Hold your cursor over the word you want to study, and you'll see original language information appear on the bottom of the screen. Click on the word to see more.
3. A window will appear giving you dictionary information and a hyperlink "search for this word" to see every time it occurs. Click on that hyperlink.
4. You will see all the verses listed where that Greek/Hebrew/Aramaic word occurs.

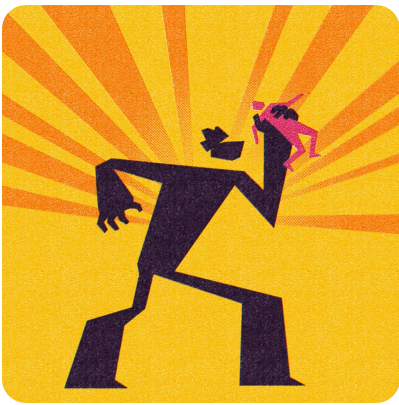
Netbible.org

<https://netbible.org/> Netbible.org is not a concordance, but it is a great resource for insights from the original language for people who don't know Greek or Hebrew. Here are the steps to access this resource.

1. Go to the website and use the search/browse tools to find the biblical text you want to study.
2. As you read, you will notice hyperlink footnotes in the biblical text related to that word/phrase/verse.
3. Click on a hyperlink, and the window on the right will pull up all kinds of original language information related to the translation and interpretation issues at work in that specific text.

Reflection Question

What sorts of other ancient flood narratives have you heard about, if any? How does comparing these stories with the biblical account help us understand the intentions of the biblical authors?



Module 2: Cosmic Rebellion in the Time of Noah

SESSIONS 7-10

Begin to unpack the story of Noah and the flood, trace its literary design, and discover the identity of the mysterious Nephilim.

Session 7: Design of Genesis 6:1-12

Key Takeaways

- The flood story begins by detailing the corruption of humanity and the land, outlining both a heavenly rebellion and an earthly rebellion as the source of this corruption.
- Genesis 6:1-12 uses repeated words and phrases from Genesis 1-3 to contrast God's good creation against the now ruined land and to compare the rebellion of the humans with the rebellion of the sons of *Elohim*.
- The picture of God's wrath in Genesis 6 is one of a brokenhearted God who hands creation over to the consequences of human and cosmic rebellion.

Cosmic Rebellion in the Time of Noah (Gen. 6:1-12)

The flood story begins with two aligned stories that focus on the corruption of "humanity" (הָאָדָם) in "the land" (הָאָרֶץ). This corruption comes from two sources, considered separately.

1. A heavenly rebellion that leads to an illicit union of spiritual and human beings, leading to the birth of violent warriors.
2. An earthly rebellion of corrupt humans whose evil causes violence that defiles the land.

In both units, there is a narrative describing tragic evil (6:1-2 and 6:5) that leads to a divine speech about Yahweh's response (6:3 and 6:6-7).

Translation and Literary Design of Genesis 6:1-12

The Rebellion of the Sons of Elohim

- a ¹ And it came about, when humanity began to **multiply (רַב)** on the face of **the land** ,
b and **daughters** **were born to/for them** ,
b' ² **the sons of Elohim** saw **the daughters of humanity** that they were good
c and they took wives for themselves, whomever they chose.

- ³ **and Yahweh said** ,
a "My Spirit/breath will not dwell with humanity forever,
b because he also is flesh;

a' and his days will be one hundred and twenty years."

- a 4 **The Nephilim** were **in the land** in those days,
and also afterward,
b when **the sons of Elohim** went
c into the **daughters of humanity**
c' and they **bore children**
b' **to/for them** ;
a' **these are the mighty warriors** who are from ancient time, men of the name.

The Rebellion of the Sons of Adam

- a 5 **And Yahweh saw** that **multiplied (רב)** was the badness of **humanity** **in the land** ,
b and every purpose of the plans of **his heart** was only bad all the day,
a' 6 and Yahweh **regretted that he made** **humanity** **in the land** .
b' And he was pained in **his heart**.

- 7 **And Yahweh said** ,
"I will wipe away **humanity** that I created from the face of **the ground** ,
from **humanity**
to animals
to creeping things
and to birds of the skies
for **I regret that I have made** them."

8 And/But Noah found favor **in the eyes of Yahweh**.

- a 9 These are the **birth**-generations of Noah;
Noah was a righteous one,
b blameless in his generation;
Noah walked with *Elohim*;
a 10 and Noah **birthed** three sons: Shem, Ham, and Japheth.

- a 11 And **the land** was **ruined** **before Elohim**.
b And **the land** was filled with violence,
a' 12 and **Elohim saw** **the land** : and behold, **it** was **ruined** ,
b' for **all flesh** had **ruined** its/his way upon **the land** .

Genesis 6:1-12 and Genesis 3

Both units of 6:1-4 and 6:5-12 contain coordinated hyperlinks back to the original creation blessing bestowed on humanity ([Gen. 1:1-2:3](#)) and to the tragic forfeit of that blessing in Genesis 3:6. The behavior of the sons of God mirrors the behavior of Eve in Genesis 3, while the “seeing” of Yahweh in Genesis 1 sadly contrasts what he sees in Genesis 6.

Genesis 1:1-2:3 - Good Multiplied

"And God saw that it was **good**" [7x]

"And God blessed them, 'Be fruitful and **multiply** (רבה), **fill the land** (מלא + ארץ).'"

Genesis 3:6 - First Fail Narrative

And **the woman saw** (ראה) **that the tree was** **good** (כי טוב) for eating and that it was enticing to the eyes and it was desirable for gaining wisdom,

and she took (לקח) its fruit and she ate and she gave to her husband with her and he ate.

Genesis 6:1-2 - Capstone Fail Narrative

And it came about when **humanity began to multiply** (רבה) on the face of **the land** (ארץ)

... and **the sons of God saw** (ויראו), **the daughters of humanity** (בנות האדם) **that they were** **good** (כי טוב), **and they took** (לקח) for themselves wives from all which they chose.

Genesis 6:5 & 6:11 - Evil Multiplied

"And Yahweh saw (וירא) **that** (כי) **multiplied** (רבה) was **the evil** of humanity (האדם רעת) in the land (ארץ).

"And **the land** (ארץ) was ruined before God, and **the land was filled** (מלא + ארץ) with violence."

Mirrored Phrases in Genesis 1, 3, and 6. Created by Tim Mackie for BibleProject Classroom: Noah to Abraham (2020).

The twin introductions to the flood narrative consist of two literary units, 6:1-4 and 6:5-8, both carefully shaped to coordinate with each other in a narrative analogy.

- Genesis 6:1-4: Humanity's multiplication leads to rebel spiritual beings seeing and taking human women.
- Genesis 6:5-8: Yahweh sees that, as a result of 6:1-4, evil and violence have multiplied in the land.

Both of these analogies depend on the narrative analogy in Genesis 1-3. When we recognize this, the analogies deepen.

Genesis 1 is designed to answer these core questions. We are going to tackle these questions in three large steps.

1. The sons of God and daughters of men / Eve and the snake
2. The daughters of men / The tree of knowing good and bad
3. The blessing and multiplication of humans on the land in Genesis 1 is sadly turned into a multiplication of death in Genesis 6

GENESIS 6

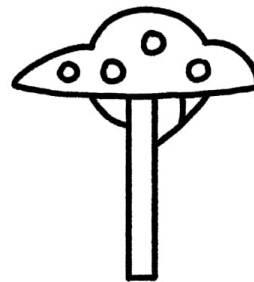
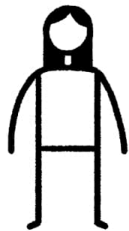
SPIRITUAL BEINGS



SEE GOOD/TAKE



GENESIS 3



Genesis 6 Mirrors Genesis 3. Illustration created by Tim Mackie for BibleProject Classroom: Noah to Abraham (2020).

Recommended Resource

For a helpful theory of worldview statements, we recommend J. Richard Middleton and Brian Walsh's book, [*Truth is Stranger Than It Used to Be: Biblical Faith in a Postmodern Age*](#).

Reflection Question

What observations did you have as we read through Genesis 6:1-12?

Session 8: The Rebellion of the Sons of *Elohim*

Key Takeaways

- The idiomatic phrase “sons of ... ” or “daughters of ... ” is used to indicate members of a group. So the sons of *Elohim* are members of a group of spiritual beings.
- The Bible claims there are powers and rulers in the heavenly realm with agency who are at work in ways very difficult for humans to be aware of.
- The rebellion of the sons of *Elohim* in Genesis 6:1-4 mirrors, inverts, and intensifies the rebellion of the humans in the garden in Genesis 3.

The Rebellion of the Sons of *Elohim*: Translation and Literary Design of Genesis 6:1-4

The Rebellion of the Sons of Elohim

- a ¹ And it came about, when humanity began to multiply (רב) on the face of the land ,
b and daughters were born to/for them ,
b' ² the sons of Elohim saw the daughters of humanity that they were good
c and they took wives for themselves, whomever they chose.

- ³ and Yahweh said ,
a “My Spirit/breath will not dwell with humanity forever,
b because he also is flesh;
a' and his days will be one hundred and twenty years.”

- a ⁴ The Nephilim were in the land in those days,
and also afterward,
b when the sons of Elohim went
c into the daughters of humanity
c' and they bore children
b' to/for them ;
a' these are the mighty warriors who are from ancient time, men of the name.

Many modern readers struggle to understand what's happening in this story or its connection to the overall story in Genesis 1-11. This struggle is a sign of our distance from the shared cultural knowledge that is assumed by the biblical authors.

The biblical authors presuppose a whole body of understanding that is clear to someone who (1) has already internalized the entire Hebrew Bible and (2) has a basic knowledge of Mesopotamian history and Babylonian propaganda. It's difficult for modern readers to track because we don't share that ancient context.

Let's tackle this text with a series of questions that will illuminate the key issues.

Who Are the Sons of *Elohim*?

The phrase "sons of *Elohim*" (בני אלהים) is used five times in the Hebrew Bible, and it always refers to spiritual beings who inhabit the divine realm in God's presence, otherwise known as the divine council.

Job 1:6 (also 2:1) NASB*

Now there was a day when **the sons of God** came to present themselves before the LORD, and the one opposed [= the Satan] also came among them.

*Key Words Adapted by Teacher

Job 38:4, 7 NASB

⁴ Where were you when I laid the foundation of the earth? ...

⁷ When the morning stars sang together, and all **the sons of God** shouted for joy?

There are two variant phrases found in Psalm 29:1, Psalm 89:7, and Psalm 82:6.

Psalm 29:1-2 NASB*

¹ Ascribe to the LORD, O **sons of God [= sons of El]**, ascribe to the LORD glory and strength.

² Ascribe to the LORD the glory due to his name; worship the LORD in holy array.

*Key Words Adapted by Teacher

Psalm 89:5-8 NASB*

⁵ The heavens will praise your wonders, Yahweh; your faithfulness also in the assembly of **the holy ones**.

⁶ For **who in the skies** is comparable to the LORD? Who among **the sons of God [= sons of El]** is like Yahweh,

⁷ an **El** greatly feared in **the council of the holy ones**, and awesome above all **those who surround him**?

⁸ Yahweh, **Elohim of hosts**, who is like you, O mighty Yahweh?

Psalm 82:1, 6-7 NASB*

¹ God has taken his place in **the divine council**;
in the midst of the *elohim* he holds judgment. ...

⁶ I said, "You are *elohim*,
sons of the Most High, all of you;

⁷ nevertheless, like humans you shall die,
and fall like any prince."

*Key Words Adapted by Teacher

This group of spiritual beings called "the divine council" (Ps. 82:1, 89:7) is also called "the host of heaven" (1 Kgs. 22:19) or "holy ones" (Ps. 89:5, 7; Job 5:1; Zech. 14:5; Dan. 8:24). These members of the divine council are the inhabitants of the spiritual realm. They are images of God's glory in the heavenly realm and correspond with humans in the earthly realm.

The Meaning of "Sons of ____" or "Daughters of ____"

In Hebrew, the plural phrase "sons of ____" is a figure of speech that means "members of the class/group of ____." The bold word is used as a descriptor of a class.

"Sons of **Bethlehem**" = inhabitants of Bethlehem (Ezra 2:21)

"Daughters of **the city**" = female residents of a city (Lam. 3:51)

"Daughters of **Edom**" = inhabitants of Edom (Ezek. 16:57)

"Sons of **Egypt**" = inhabitants of Egypt (Ezek. 16:26)

"Sons of **the prophets**" = members of Elisha's prophetic group (2 Kgs. 2:15)

"Sons of **humanity**" = members of the human race (2 Sam. 7:14)

"Daughters of **the song**" = female singers (Ecc. 12:4)

In each case, the plural "sons/daughters of ____" refers to people who are members of a group or class that qualifies their identity in some way. In Genesis 6:1-2 we find:

- "Daughters of humanity" = human daughters
- "Sons of *Elohim*" = *Elohim* beings, i.e., spiritual beings

Genesis 6:1 draws a strong contrast between the "daughters of humanity" and the "sons of *Elohim*" because the point at issue is the violation of boundaries between human and divine.

Other Interpretations of the Sons of *Elohim*

Some interpreters argue that the sons of *Elohim* in Genesis 6 are human beings.

The Sethite View

This view is a Christian interpretation that dates back to the 4th century C.E. It argues that the sons of God are the godly line of Seth, who worship the true God ([Gen. 4:26](#)) and are contrasted with the un-godly line of Cain. Genesis 5:1-5 portrays Adam as a “son of God,” and so it is argued that the sons of God are in fact the sons of Adam through Seth. For more on this, see Augustine’s *City of God*, book 4, chapter 23.

Problems: The Hebrew Bible attests the plural phrase “sons of *Elohim*” and its variations over eight times, and it is used specifically to refer to the divine council. The text is more likely contrasting a boundary violation between humans and *elohim*. Seth and Cain are not mentioned in Genesis 6:1-4, nor is there any reference to intermarriage prohibitions between two human families.

The Divinized Human Rulers View

This modern view appeals to texts where human rulers are put on analogy with the divine. For example, when someone from the line of David is adopted as a “son of *Elohim*” (see [Ps. 2:7](#)), or when God’s covenant people Israel are called Yahweh’s “firstborn son” ([Exod. 4:23](#)). In this view, Genesis 6:1-4 is about human rulers who abused their divinely appointed role and engaged in polygamous marriages. For more information, see Meredith Kline, “Divine Kingship and Genesis 6:1-4.”

Problems: Genesis 6:1-2 nowhere says that the marriages were polygamous. And while there are ancient Near Eastern parallels to divine kings as the son of a god, there is no parallel to an entire group or nation that is called “God’s son” like Israel is ([Exod. 4:23](#)). The plural phrase “sons of *Elohim*” in biblical Hebrew refers uniquely to spiritual beings.

Conclusion: The most compelling explanation of the words used in Genesis 6:14 is that spiritual beings have abandoned the heavenly realm and invaded the human realm.

Reflection Question

Who or what are the sons of *Elohim*?

Session 9: The Identity of the Nephilim

Key Takeaways

- 120 years is how long it is until the flood comes. This is how long Noah will be having this dialogue with God as he builds his divinely provided refuge.
- Nephilim translates to “the fallen ones,” as in those who fall in battle. Ancient Israel’s neighbors celebrated those who won glory through conquest in battle. The Gibborim and Nephilim were heroes to the Babylonians and Canaanites, but the biblical authors see their violence as everything that is wrong with the human family.
- Genesis 6:4 is the origin story of the warrior giants the Israelites must face as they enter and occupy Canaan. These giants fill the narrative slot of the seed of the snake in the unfolding drama of the Hebrew Bible.

Did the Sons of *Elohim* Actually Have Sex With Human Women?

The plain sense meaning of this story is fairly clear: Yes, these spiritual beings crossed the Heaven and Earth boundary and had sex with women.

The phrase “and they took women for themselves” is a standard biblical Hebrew phrase for sexual intercourse, including illicit sex (see [Gen. 38:2](#); [Lev. 18:17](#), [20:17](#)).

When spiritual beings are sent on missions in the earthly realm, they are called by a functional title, *malakim* in Hebrew and in Greek, *angelos*, that is, “angels.” In the story of the Bible, angels regularly take on a human appearance and interact with humans in a physical way. They can walk with people, have meals (see [Gen. 18:1-5](#)), and wrestle with them as well (see [Gen. 32:23-32](#)).

This cosmic cross-species sexual encounter is reinforced by the presence of a narrative design pattern used by the author, who connects Genesis 6:1-4 with Genesis 3:1-7.

Genesis 2-3: The Snake and the Woman

Genesis 3:6 NASB*

And the woman saw (ראה) that the tree was good (טוב) for eating and **that (כי)** it was enticing to the eyes and it was desirable for gaining wisdom **and she took (לקח)** its fruit and she ate and she gave to her husband with her and he ate.

*Key Words Adapted by Teacher

Genesis 2:24 NASB*

Therefore a man will leave his father and his mother and cling to his wife and they will become one **flesh** (בשר).

*Key Words Adapted by Teacher

Genesis 6:1-14: The Sons of God and Human Women

Genesis 6:1-2 NASB*

¹ And it came about when humanity began to multiply on the face of the land ... ² and **the sons of God saw** (ראה), the daughters of humanity (בנות האדם) **that** (כי) they **were good** (טוב), and **they took** (לקח) for themselves wives from all which they chose.

*Key Words Adapted by Teacher

Genesis 6:3 NASB*

And Yahweh said, "My Spirit will not dwell with humanity forever, in as much as he also is **flesh** (בשר), and his days will be one hundred and twenty years.

*Key Words Adapted by Teacher

The action of the sons of God is portrayed as an intensified inversion of the garden story. Instead of the woman taking what is good in her own eyes because of the deception of a spiritual being, in Genesis 6, it is rebel spiritual beings who take women who are good in their eyes.

The analogy, which is intended by the author, also prompts us to consider the motive of the sons of God in light of the woman's motive. The woman desired to have divine wisdom and life in the garden on her own terms instead of honoring the creator's command. This prompts the reader to consider the unstated motive of the sons of God in Genesis 6:1-2. If they are set on analogy with the woman, we are encouraged to see their "taking women" as a move to restore the life of Eden to humanity, in opposition to God's command to exile them from access to the tree of life.

Later in Genesis 19, we find a narrative designed on analogy with Genesis 3 and 6:1-4. In the story of Lot's hosting the two angels in Sodom, the men of Sodom come to Lot's house in order to gang rape the "men" (the angels). And Lot, in a horrifying act of betrayal, offers his daughters to the crowd of men instead of the angels. In contrast to the corrupt sons of God who take the daughters of men, here a man offers his own daughters in the place of two sons of God. In Lot's case, the angels intervene and strike all the men of Sodom with blindness. The intended analogy sets up a contrast: It shows just how corrupt humanity has become once again, presenting Lot as the opposite of Abraham and Noah.

Genesis 6:1-4

- The sons of God visit human daughters
- The sons of God have sex with them

Genesis 19

- The men of Sodom want to have sex with the sons of God who visit Sodom
- Lot offers his daughters for sex

Comparing the Sons of God with the Men of Sodom. Created by Tim Mackie for BibleProject Classroom: Adam to Noah (2020).

Genesis 6:1-4	Genesis 19
• God rescues Noah and his sons • The land is destroyed by water from the sky	• Angels rescue Lot and his daughters • The city is destroyed by fire from the sky
<i>Comparing the Sons of God with the Men of Sodom.</i> Created by Tim Mackie for BibleProject Classroom: Adam to Noah (2020).	

How Is Genesis 6:3 a Response to the Rebellion of Spiritual Beings?

Genesis 6:3 NASB*

And Yahweh said,
 (a) “My Spirit/breath will not dwell with the human forever,
 (b) because he too is flesh,
 (c) and so his days will be one hundred and twenty years.”

*Key Words Adapted by Teacher

“My Spirit/breath will not dwell forever”

This line recalls two earlier moments in Genesis 1-3.

In Genesis 2:7, humanity is animated by God’s “breath of life.” It is only by God’s gift of life-energy that human existence is possible.

In Genesis 2:9 and 3:22, God wants humans to eat from the tree that unites them with God’s own eternal life. However, once humans have rebelled, he exiles them from access to his eternal life presence. Here in Genesis 6:3, spiritual beings have rebelled by uniting with human women, and God’s words reveal the motive: to restore eternal life to the rebellious human family! God is here saying that these illicit unions will not generate eternal life but will end in the same fate as the foolish humans in Genesis 3:22-24.

“Will not dwell (yadon) with the human”

The Hebrew word *yadon* (יָדֹן) occurs only here in ancient biblical Hebrew. There have been multiple proposals about its meaning based on Semitic languages that are related to Hebrew.

- “Judge, condemn” (related to Hebrew: *duwn* / דָּוַן) [adopted by the NIV as “contend”]
- “Strive, struggle” (NASB, KJV)

All of these proposals have been scrutinized and have no real evidence (see John Day, “The Sons of God and the Daughters of Men and the Giants,” p. 87-89)

This verb almost certainly comes from a Semitic root *danan* (דָּנַן) “to remain, abide with” (see Umberto Cassuto, *A Commentary on the Book of Genesis (Part I): From Adam to Noah*, 296). This is how the earliest translators of the Hebrew Bible into Greek understood the verb.

- Septuagint *καταμείνη* / 4Q252 ידור

“Because he too is flesh”

This could be a statement about all humanity in general, but given the literary frame around Genesis 6:3 that refers to illicit sex between spiritual and human beings, this verse likely has a more specific focus.

The phrase “because he too is flesh” shows that the focus of God’s statement is creatures alongside normal humanity, that is, the children of the human and spiritual beings who have sex in Genesis 6:1-2.

In “The Episode of the Sons of God and the Daughters of Men,” Umberto Cassuto writes about how God has breathed life into humanity, but the children that will be born of these illicit unions between the sons of God and the daughters of men are not humanity in the full sense. They are mortal like their mothers, and here God declares that these children are “flesh” and so will not share in the immortal life of their fathers. Rather, they will die like all members of the human race “because they too are flesh” (Cassuto, 1973).

“His days will be one hundred and twenty years”

This statement has been interpreted in two ways.

1. It refers to a divine limit placed on the life span of humanity in general, in contrast to the long lifetimes of the patriarchs in Genesis chapter 5.

“Cutting short their lives, and making their years not so many as they formerly lived, but one hundred and twenty only.”

Josephus, Flavius. *Antiquities of the Jews*. 1.3.2.

There are a couple problems with this view. It creates a strange narrative logic. Because of the rebellious actions of a few, all humanity is “punished” with a shortened life span.

This is also strange because many people after Genesis 6 live longer than 120 years: Abraham (175 years, Gen. 25:7), Isaac (180 years, Gen. 35:28), and Jacob (147 years, Gen. 47:28), etc.

2. It refers to the number of years before the coming of the flood. This is in fact the oldest interpretation of Genesis 6:3 preserved in Jewish literature.

It is mentioned in the Dead Sea Scrolls. “In the year four hundred and eighty of Noah’s life, Noah reached the end of them. And God said: My spirit will not reside in man for ever. Their days shall be fixed at one hundred and twenty years until the end of the waters of the flood” (4Q252 1.1-3, see Devorah Dimant, “The Flood as Preamble: The Perspective of the Qumran Hebrew Texts,” pp. 110-122).

It is also mentioned in the Aramaic Targums Onkelos (“may a lengthening of time be given to them, one hundred and twenty years, that they might repent” / ארכא יהיב להון מאה ועשרין שנים אם יתובון) and Targum Neofiti (“Behold, I have given the span of one hundred and twenty years (in the hope that) perhaps they might do repentance, but they have not done so” / די יעבדון תשובה ולא עבדו). And much later, Rashi.

Genesis 6:4: Are the Nephilim the Offspring of the Sons of Elohim?

In addition to spiritual beings having sex with women, this is the next strangest part of the story.

The Rebellion of the Sons of Elohim

- a 4 **The Nephilim** were **in the land** in those days,
and also afterward,
b when **the sons of Elohim** went
c into the **daughters of humanity**
c' and they **bore children**
b' **to/for them** ;
a' **these are the mighty warriors** who are from ancient time, men of the name.

Genesis 6:1-12. Translation and Literary Design by Tim Mackie for BibleProject Classroom: Noah to Abraham (2020).

This passage tells us that a group called the Nephilim lived in the land “in those days.” The word “Nephilim” appears only one other time in the Hebrew Bible, and it helps us understand what’s happening here in Genesis 6.

Numbers 13:32-33 NASB*

³² So [the spies] gave the sons of Israel a bad report of the land which they had spied out, saying, “The land through which we have gone, in spying it out, is a land that devours its inhabitants; and all the people whom we saw in it are **men of great size**. ³³ There also we saw **the Nephilim (the sons of Anak are from the Nephilim)**; and we became like grasshoppers in our own sight, and so we were in their sight.”

*Key Words Adapted by Teacher

The Nephilim are giant warriors from ancient times. This is why the first translation of the Hebrew Bible into ancient Greek (produced around 300-100 B.C.E.) translated the Hebrew word Nephilim as γίγαντες / gigantes / giant!

The word Nephilim is not a translation but a transliteration of the Hebrew word. It is a noun derived from the Hebrew root *naphal* meaning “to fall.” It mostly likely means “fallen ones,” referring to warriors fallen in battle. The verbal form of this root is found describing fallen warriors (Gibborim, also used in Gen. 6:4) elsewhere in the Hebrew Bible.

2 Samuel 1:27 NASB*

How have the **mighty warriors** (*gibborim*) **fallen** (*naphal*), and the weapons of war perished!

*Key Words Adapted by Teacher

Ezekiel 32:11-12 NASB*

¹¹ For thus says Yahweh Elohim [to Egypt], “The sword of the king of Babylon will come upon you. By the swords of the **mighty warriors** (*gibborim*) ¹² I will cause your hordes **to fall** (*naphal*); all of them are tyrants of the nations, and they will devastate the pride of Egypt, and all its hordes will be destroyed.”

*Key Words Adapted by Teacher

These giant warriors have a prominent role in the biblical stories about Israel’s entry into the land promised to Abraham. Many of the cities and kings that attacked the Israelites when they entered the land were among the offspring of these giant warriors whose origin stems back to the Nephilim.

Deuteronomy 9:1-2 NIV

¹ Hear, Israel: You are now about to cross the Jordan to go in and dispossess **nations greater and stronger than you**, with large cities that have walls up to the sky. ² **The people are strong and tall—Anakites!** You know about them and have heard it said: “Who can stand up against the Anakites?”

Deuteronomy 2:10-11 NIV

¹⁰ The **Emites** used to live there—a **people strong** and numerous, and as **tall as the Anakites**. ¹¹ Like the **Anakites**, they too were considered **Rephaim**, but the Moabites called them Emites.

Deuteronomy 3:10-11 NIV

¹⁰ We took all the towns on the plateau, and all Gilead, and all Bashan as far as Salekah and Edrei, towns of Og’s kingdom in Bashan. ¹¹ (**Og king of Bashan was the last of the Rephaim. His bed was decorated with iron and was more than nine cubits long and four cubits wide. It is still in Rabbah of the Ammonites.**)

Joshua 11:21-22 NIV

²¹ At that time Joshua went and destroyed the **Anakites** from the hill country: from Hebron, Debir and Anab, from all the hill country of Judah, and from all the hill country of Israel. Joshua totally destroyed them and their towns. ²² **No Anakites were left in Israelite territory;** only in Gaza, **Gath** and Ashdod **did any survive**.

1 Samuel 17:4 NIV

A champion named **Goliath, who was from Gath**, came out of the Philistine camp. His height was six cubits and a span.

Amos 2:9 NASB

Yet it was I who destroyed **the Amorite** before them, though **his height was like the height of cedars** and he was **strong as the oaks**; I even destroyed his fruit above and his root below.

But are these giant warriors of old the offspring of the sons of *Elohim* and the daughters of men? The text is not explicit; rather it uses poetic parallel structures to suggest this.

“The Nephilim were in the land **in those days ... when** the sons of God were going into the daughters of men and they were bearing children for them, these were the mighty warriors.”

The poetic structure of the text coordinates the two things:

1. The presence of the great, giant warriors of the ancient past

2. The sons of *Elohim* having sex with women.

The phrase “in the day, which ...” (Heb. *yom* + *’asher* / יום + אשר) is a standard way of coordinating two events as taking place at the same time (see Deut. 4:10; 1 Kgs. 22:25; Judg. 4:14; 2 Sam. 19:25; see *The Brown-Driver-Briggs Hebrew and English Lexicon*, p. 82).

It’s as if the text is drawing attention to the presence of the Nephilim in the land during the time period when the sons of *Elohim* were having sex with women. Hint hint.

“Mighty Warriors”

The Hebrew word is *gibbor* (singular) and *gibborim* (plural). While this word is not inherently negative (it will be applied to Israelite warriors in Josh. 1:14 and heroes like David in 2 Sam. 17:10), the strategic uses of this word in Genesis 1-11 associate it with the sad portrait of human violence that violates God’s purposes for life. This violent strain runs from Cain to Nimrod.

Cain’s violence → Lemek’s escalated violence → the violent giants → Nimrod the violent warrior

“Men of the Name”

Genesis 6:4 says that fallen warriors of old used violent conquest in order to elevate their name. This is the narrator’s characterization of the human family in relation to the line and city of Cain.

In Genesis 6:4, we’re told that these warriors were not glorious founders of the ancient kingdoms and conduits of divine knowledge. Rather, they were the result of a spiritual rebellion and destined to “fall” unto death.

This portrait of a violent warrior (*Gibbor*) who achieves a great name through conquest is setting us up for the portrait of Nimrod in Genesis 10, the Babylonian desire for a great name in Genesis 11, and God’s desire to give Abram a name in Genesis 12.

- “Daughters of humanity” = human daughters
- “Sons of *Elohim*” = *elohim* beings, i.e., spiritual beings

This makes sense of why the text of Genesis 6:1 draws such a strong contrast between the “daughters of humanity” and the “sons of *Elohim*.” The point at issue is the violation of boundaries between human and divine.

Reflection Question

The author tells us that the Nephilim are “mighty warriors ... men of the name.” Is this a good thing or a bad thing? How do we know?

Session 10: Giants in Ancient Near Eastern Context

Key Takeaways

- Genesis 6:1-4 is the origin story of Babylon, the empire that will take Israel into exile.
- The Hebrew Bible offers a sophisticated critique of monarchy.
- The problem of evil originates in both human and spiritual rebellion, and the Nephilim and the other giant warrior kings of the Hebrew Bible are a constant reminder of the spiritual forces at work.

The Sons of *Elohim* and the Giant Nephilim in Ancient Cultural Context

Summary so far: Genesis 6 is telling us that all of these violent and very tall warrior kings who spread death and terror throughout the ancient world originated in a spiritual rebellion. The concept of human-divine warriors was a common idea in the culture of the ancient Near East. Many ancient empires, especially Egypt, Assyria, and Babylon claimed that their empires were founded by giant warriors who were half human and half deity.

There was a widespread tradition in ancient Assyria and Babylon that the most ancient roots of civilization and kingship came from the gods from before the time of the flood. These traditions are expressed in a series of ancient texts called The Sumerian King Lists, which are found in multiple versions. For more about these ancient texts, see *The Sumerian King Lists* by Thorkild Jacobsen (1939) and *Enoch and the Growth of an Apocalyptic Tradition*, chapter 2, by James VanderKam (1984).

The Sumerian King Lists	Genesis 5
There are 10 kings from the creation of kingship to the flood and right after the flood.	There are 10 generations from Adam to the flood of Noah, who lives after the flood.
The first king, Alulim, is appointed by the oldest gods.	Adam and Eve (= ‘adam, “humanity”) is appointed as the royal image of God to rule all creation.
The final king is chosen to survive the flood.	Noah, the tenth, is chosen to survive the flood.
The 10 kings rule for hyperbolically long periods of time (two versions are based on WB 62 and WB	The 10 patriarchs live for long periods of time
Similarities Between the Sumerian King List and Genesis 5. Created by Tim Mackie for BibleProject Classroom: Adam to Noah (2020).	

The Sumerian King Lists	Genesis 5
444; see Jacobsen, <i>The Sumerian King Lists</i>, 70-77). Alulim - 67,200 or 28,000 Alalgar - 72,000 or 36,000 Kidunnu - 72,000 or 43,200 Alimma - 21,600 or 28,800 Dumuzi - 21,600 or 36,000 Enmenluanna - 21,600 or 28,800 Enmeduranki - 36,000 or 21,000 Enmeduranna - 72,000 or 18,000 Ubartutu - 28,000 or [NA] Ziusudra - 36,000 or [NA]	Adam - 930 years Seth - 912 years Enosh - 905 years Qenan - 910 years Mahalalel - 895 years Yared - 962 years Enoch - 365 years Methushelah - 969 years Lemek - 777 years Noah - 950 years
The seventh king, Enmeduranki, lived through the flood and has a unique role among the gods.	The seventh patriarch, Enoch, does not die but is translated to God's realm because of his special relationship with God.
<i>Similarities Between the Sumerian King List and Genesis 5. Created by Tim Mackie for BibleProject Classroom: Adam to Noah (2020).</i>	

The Lineage of the Apkallu and the Kings of Babylon

“In Mesopotamian religion, the term apkallu is used for the legendary creatures endowed with extraordinary wisdom. Seven in number, they are the culture heroes from before the Flood. Some of the mythological speculations in which they figure have exerted influence on certain biblical and post-biblical traditions. Examples are the figure of Enoch and the tale of the Nephilim (Gen. 6:1-4) ... [T]he ‘seven apkallu ... are at the service of the high God Ea. Ea is called the “sage among the gods” (apkallu ili)’ ... A variety of wisdom traditions from the antediluvian period were supposedly passed on by the apkallu. We also learn from the ‘Myth of the Seven Sages’ that the later apkallu were ‘of human descent, whom the lord Ea has endowed with wisdom’ ... The seven sages were created in the river and served as ‘those who ensured the correct functioning of the plans of heaven and earth.’”

Greenfield, J. C. (1999). "Apkallu." [Dictionary of Deities and Demons in the Bible](#). Eerdmans. 72-73.

“These apkallu were the divine source of all of the wisdom that was passed onto the founders of Mesopotamian culture and empire. [T]he root of Mesopotamian knowledge unites divination, horoscopy, astronomy in a learned cuneiform tradition. This way of identifying knowledge ... was connected with the [apkallu], from whom all this knowledge was derived in the days before the flood.”

Rochberg, Francesca (2007). [The Heavenly Writing: Divination, Horoscopy, and Astronomy in Mesopotamian Culture](#). Cambridge University Press. 17.

There is an important Babylonian text that traces the lineage of the seven apkallu who are divine beings down to the post-flood kings of Mesopotamia, and the final four apkallu are called “of human descent ... two-thirds apkallu.” And not only this, but these post-flood human-divine hybrids are giants!



Jastrow (2006). [Wikipedia](#)

For example: The ancient Sumerian king Gilgamesh was portrayed in Sumerian mythology as part human, part god and really tall! See this depiction of Gilgamesh from the late Assyrian period, 8th century B.C.E. He is depicted as giant hunter with a lion and a snake in his hands. Gilgamesh's legacy is likely behind the portrait of Nimrod in Genesis 10:9-10, who built Babylon and Erech, which is the Hebrew spelling of Uruk, Gilgamesh's city.

Recommended Resources

Heiser, Michael (2017). *Reversing Hermon: Enoch, The Watchers, and the Forgotten Mission of Jesus Christ*. Defender. Chapter 3.

Annus, Amar (2010). "On the Origin of Watchers: A Comparative Study of the Antediluvian Wisdom in Mesopotamian and Jewish Traditions." *Journal for the Study of the Pseudepigrapha*, Volume 19.4. 277-320.

Conclusions About the Sons of *Elohim* and the Nephilim

“The reason Genesis 6:1-4 is in the Bible is because the writer sought to target the deeply held religious beliefs of Mesopotamia, and, most pointedly, the myth of Babylonian superiority ... ‘These accounts of the [pre-flood] history in ancient Mesopotamian and Jewish sources should be regarded as results of ancient debates. Not only direct borrowings took place, but also creative interpretations, especially on the Jewish side ... [T]hese were deliberate inversions of Mesopotamian traditions. The Jewish authors often inverted the Mesopotamian myths, with the intention of showing the superiority of their own cultural foundations ...’ The point was to turn the Mesopotamian belief system on its head, to make sure that Israelites and Jewish readers would know that what happened between the sons of God and the daughters of humankind was not something that bettered humanity. It was the opposite—a transgression of heaven and earth that would corrupt humankind and produce a lineage that would later become a threat to the very existence of Israel, Yahweh’s people and portion.”

Heiser, Michael (2017). [*Reversing Hermon: Enoch, The Watchers, and the Forgotten Mission of Jesus Christ*](#). Defender. 49-51. Includes an embedded quote by Annus, Amar (2010). [*“On the Origin of Watchers.” Journal for the Study of the Pseudepigrapha*](#), Volume 19:4. 277-320.

Genesis 6:1-4 is the introduction to the story of the flood, which begins in Genesis 6:5. In other words, the flood of divine justice is God’s response to human wickedness in general but also specifically to the outbreak of violence and war caused by the warrior giants, who were themselves the result of a transgression of the sons of *Elohim*.

The flood narrative is God’s attempt to purify the land from the innocent blood shed by the Nephilim and their violence. We are meant to see that many of the Nephilim perish in the flood. But in the Hebrew Bible, that doesn’t mean the end of their threat. As Genesis 6:4 notes, they are still around after the flood.

The Sons of *Elohim* and Nephilim and Spiritual Evil

These warriors go by many names: Emim, Anakim, and **Rephaim**. This last title is fascinating because it is most often used in the Bible to refer to the **spirits of dead warrior kings**.

Isaiah 26:13-14 NIV*

¹³ LORD our God, other lords besides you **have ruled over us**,
but your name alone do we honor.

¹⁴ They are now dead, they live no more;

the Rephaim do not rise.

You punished them and brought them to ruin;
you wiped out all memory of them.

*Key Words Adapted by Teacher

Isaiah 14:9 NIV*

The realm of the dead below is all astir
to meet you at your coming;

it rouses **the Rephaim** to greet you—

all those who were **leaders in the world**;

it makes them rise from their thrones—
all those who were **kings over the nations**.

*Key Words Adapted by Teacher

Psalm 88:4-5, 10 NASB*

⁴ I am reckoned among those who go down to the pit;
I have become like a man without strength,
⁵ forsaken among the dead, like the slain who lie in the grave,
whom you remember no more, and they are cut off from your hand. ...
¹⁰ Will you perform wonders for the dead?
Will **the Rephaim** rise and praise you?

*Key Words Adapted by Teacher

The Hebrew Bible references God's judgment on the Rephaim as a banishment to the grave.

Ezekiel 32:26-27 NASB*

²⁶ Meshech, Tubal and all their hordes are there; their graves surround them. All of them were slain by the sword uncircumcised, though they instilled their terror in the land of the living. ²⁷ Nor do they lie beside **the fallen (naphal) warriors (gibborim)** of the uncircumcised, who **went down to Sheol** with their weapons of war and whose swords were laid under their heads; **but the punishment for their iniquity** rested on their bones, for the terror of these warriors was once in the land of the living.

*Key Words Adapted by Teacher

Isaiah 24:21-23 NASB

²¹ So it will happen in that day,
that the LORD will punish **the host of heaven on high,
and the kings of the earth on earth**.
²² They will be **gathered together
like prisoners in the dungeon,**
and will be **confined in prison;**
and after many days they will be punished.
²³ Then the moon will be abashed and the sun ashamed,
for the LORD of hosts will reign on Mount Zion and in Jerusalem,
and his glory will be before his elders.

These Rephaim, the surviving spirits in the realm of the dead, are associated with the Nephilim and the giant warrior kings who originated back in the spiritual rebellion of the sons of God in Genesis 6.

The Bible confirms that these Nephilim/Rephaim are corrupted spiritual beings when Peter and Jude refer back to them.

2 Peter 2:4-5 NASB*

⁴ For if God did not spare **angels when they sinned**, but cast them into **Tartarus** and **committed them to pits of darkness, reserved for judgment**; ⁵ and did not spare the ancient world, but preserved Noah, a preacher of righteousness, with seven others, when he brought a flood upon the world of the ungodly.

*Key Words Adapted by Teacher

Jude 1:6-7 NASB

⁶ And **angels who did not keep their own domain, but abandoned their proper abode, he has kept in eternal bonds under darkness for the judgment of the great day**, ⁷ just as Sodom and Gomorrah and the cities around them, since they in the same way as these indulged in gross immorality and **went after strange flesh**, are exhibited as an example in undergoing the punishment of eternal fire.

Peter and Jude are reflecting on Genesis 6:1-4 and merging its ideas with the depictions of the Rephaim as spirits of the dead. Notice how Jude verse 7 has connected the two stories of the sons of God in Genesis 6 and the men of Sodom in Genesis 19.

Spiritual Rebels and Babylon

These giant warrior kings play a key role in the final human and spiritual rebellion narrative in Genesis 1-11: the founding of Babylon.

Consider the two stories about the foundation of the Babylonian empire in Genesis 10-11.

Genesis 10:6-10 NASB

⁶ The sons of **Ham** were **Cush** and Mizraim and Put and Canaan. ⁷ The sons of **Cush** were Seba and Havilah and Sabtah and Raamah and Sabteca; and the sons of Raamah were Sheba and Dedan. ⁸ Now **Cush** became the father of **Nimrod**; he became a mighty warrior on the earth. ⁹ He was a mighty warrior, a hunter before the LORD; therefore it is said, "Like Nimrod a mighty hunter before the LORD." ¹⁰ The beginning of his kingdom was Babylon and Erech and Accad and Calneh, in the land of Shinar.

Genesis 11:1-4 NASB

¹ Now the whole earth used the same language and the same words. ² It came about as they journeyed east, that they found a plain in the land of Shinar and settled there. ³ They said to one another, "Come, let us make bricks and burn them thoroughly." And they used brick for stone, and they used tar for mortar. ⁴ They said, "Come, **let us build for ourselves a city, and a tower whose top will reach into the heavens**, and let us make for ourselves a name, otherwise we will be scattered abroad over the face of the whole earth."

Links Back to Genesis 3 and 6

Nimrod is the grandson of Ham, Noah's son, and he is called a "mighty warrior" (Heb. *gibbor*), which is the same word used to describe the offspring of the sons of God and human women in Genesis 6:4! The rebel sons of God are behind the founding of Babylon just as they were behind the story of Genesis 6.

Nimrod, who is identified with the giants of Genesis 6, builds the kingdom of Babylon and Erech (Heb. אֶרֶךְ), which is the same as the ancient city of Uruk, where Gilgamesh the original giant king lived.

Genesis 11 gives us a complementary story of Babylon's origins. We're told the city and its temple tower was built in order to "have a top in the heavens." In other words, the temple tower of Babylon is portrayed as a human-made attempt to re-create Eden, the original mountain-temple where Heaven and Earth overlapped.

The idea that the foundation of Babylon was a joint human-spiritual rebellion is also made clear by the portrayal of the ruler of Babylon in Isaiah 14, which looks back at Genesis 10-11.

Isaiah 14:4-5, 12-15 NASB

⁴ You all will take up this taunt against the king of Babylon, and say,
"How the oppressor has ceased,
and how fury has ceased!

⁵ The LORD has broken the staff of the wicked the scepter of rulers ..."

¹² "How you have fallen from heaven,
O star of the morning, son of the dawn!
You have been cut down to the earth,
you who have weakened the nations!

¹³ But you said in your heart,
'I will ascend to the heavens;
I will raise my throne above the stars of God,
and I will sit on the mount of assembly
in the recesses of the north.

¹⁴ I will ascend above the heights of the clouds;
I will make myself like the Most High.'

¹⁵ Nevertheless you will be thrust down to Sheol,
to the recesses of the pit."

In this poem, Isaiah depicts the king of Babylon as a human rebel who embodies the spiritual rebel behind the origins of Babylon. Babylon is founded by Nimrod, a warrior giant associated with the Nephilim, and Babylon is built up as an anti-Eden in Genesis 11. The author of Isaiah is saying Babylon is more than just a human enterprise; it is an icon of the human and spiritual rebellion.

Conclusions About Spiritual and Human Evil in Genesis 1-11 and the Hebrew Scriptures

We have encountered multiple intertwined spiritual and human rebellions in Genesis 1-11.

In Genesis 3-4, the original spiritual rebel is a former exalted throne guardian of God's heavenly temple who resents being subservient to exalted humans. So he lures them into the same temptation he succumbed to, seizing authority by his own wisdom and abusing it for selfish purposes. We then watch humans replay this rebellion, first with Adam and Eve, and then with Cain's murder of his brother.

In Genesis 6 and 11, even more members of the divine council rebel in an intensification of the Genesis 3 rebellion. This results in the spread of creatures who are part spiritual being/part human and who spread violence through their empires, beginning with Babylon. As many of these beings die in the flood, their spirits live on in the underworld as terrifying monsters.

These narratives provide three categories of spiritual evil:

1. An arch-rebel depicted by the imagery of the snake (Gen. 3) and sin (Gen. 4).
2. Lower-level spiritual rebels who deceive humans into exalting their empires to divine status.
3. Deceased spirits of the Nephilim who endure a shadowy existence in the underworld.

Reflection Question

What are some of the notable characteristics of the legendary kings of the ancient Mesopotamian world?



Module 3: God's Warnings About the Flood

SESSIONS 11-14

Storm clouds begin to gather as God's good world is filled with injustice. How does Yahweh respond to the outcry of violence in his creation?

Session 11: The Rebellion of the Sons of Adam

Key Takeaways

- Being in covenant with God has nothing to do with being ethnically a part of Abraham's family. It means imitating Abraham's trust in God.
- The outcry of the ruined land is a key motif showing us how human corruption and suffering prompts God to act.
- The flood is part of the biblical pattern where we see God's judgment and his mercy at work simultaneously.

The Rebellion of the Sons of Adam: Translation and Literary Design of Genesis 6:5-12

The Rebellion of the Sons of Adam

a 5 **And Yahweh saw** that **multiplied (רב)** was the badness of **humanity** **in the land** ,
b and every purpose of the plans of **his heart** was only bad all the day,

a' 6 and Yahweh **regretted that he made** **humanity** **in the land** .
b' And he was pained in **his heart**.

7 **And Yahweh said** ,
"I will wipe away **humanity** that I created from the face of **the ground** ,
from **humanity**
to animals
to creeping things
and to birds of the skies
for **I regret that I have made** them."

8 And/But Noah found favor **in the eyes of Yahweh**.

a 9 These are the **birth**-generations of Noah;
Noah was a righteous one,
b blameless in his generation;

Noah walked with *Elohim*;
 a 10 and Noah **birthed** three sons: Shem, Ham, and Japheth.

a 11 And **the land** was **ruined** *before Elohim*.
 b And **the land** was filled with violence,
 a' 12 and *Elohim saw* **the land** : and behold, **it** was **ruined**,
 b' for **all flesh** had **ruined** its/his way upon **the land** .

Genesis 6:1-12. Translation and Literary Design by Tim Mackie for BibleProject Classroom: Noah to Abraham (2020).

The Righteous One is Delivered from Death

Noah is described with two new terms (righteous and blameless), and one term already used of Enoch (walked with God). The analogy between Noah and Enoch has a clear purpose.

Life and Outcome	Enoch	Noah
"walked with God"	5:22 and Enoch walked with God three hundred years after he became the father of Methuselah, and he caused the birth of sons and daughters, ²³ and all the days of Enoch were three hundred and sixty-five years. ²⁴ And Enoch walked with God ;	6:9 Noah was a righteous one, blameless in his generation; Noah walked with God .
Delivered from death	²⁴ and he was not, for God took him.	Rescued from death through the ark
<i>Life and Outcome of Enoch and Noah</i> . Created by Tim Mackie for BibleProject Classroom: Noah to Abraham (2020).		

The goal of this analogy is to fill out the picture of what it means to walk with God.

- Just as Enoch walked with God and was delivered from death, so Noah walks with God and is delivered from death.
- Just as Enoch walked with God, so Noah was righteous and blameless.

Genesis 17:1 NASB

Now when Abram was ninety-nine years old, the LORD appeared to Abram and said to him, "I am God Almighty; **walk before me**, and be **blameless**.

Genesis 24:40 NASB*

[Abraham] said to me, “**Yahweh, before whom I have walked**, will send his angel with you to make your journey successful, and you will take a wife for my son from my relatives and from my father’s house”

*Key Words Adapted by Teacher

Genesis 48:15 NASB

[Jacob] blessed Joseph, and said, “The God **before whom my fathers Abraham and Isaac walked**, the God who has been my shepherd all my life to this day”

To be righteous means to do right by Yahweh, by trusting and following his wisdom; to do right by one’s neighbor; to be blameless means to live with ethical integrity, as a morally “whole” person.

Genesis 15:5-6 NASB

⁵ And he took him outside and said, “Now look toward the heavens, and count the stars, if you are able to count them.” And he said to him, “So shall your descendants be.” ⁶ Then he believed in the LORD; and he **reckoned it to him as righteousness**.

Psalms 15:1-3 NASB

¹ O LORD, who may abide in your tent?
Who may dwell on your holy hill?

² **He who walks with blamelessness, and practices righteousness**,
and speaks truth in his heart.

³ He does not slander with his tongue,
nor does evil to his neighbor,
nor takes up a reproach against his friend

This opening scene of the flood narrative shows a density of key words that will become thematic for the flood design pattern throughout the Hebrew Bible. All of the words are keyed off the scene of Noah’s birth name in 5:29.

Genesis 5:29 NASB*

And [Lamech] called his name **Noah (נח)** saying, “This one will **give us comfort (נחם)** from our work and from the toil of our hands from the ground which the LORD has cursed.”

*Key Words Adapted by Teacher

Genesis 6:5-13 Instructor's Translation

⁵ And Yahweh saw that multiplied was the badness of humanity in the land,
and every **purpose (מחשבת)** of the plans of his heart was only bad all the day,

⁶ and Yahweh **regretted (נחם)** that he made humanity in the land,
and he was pained in his heart.

⁷ And Yahweh said,
“**I will wipe away (מחה)** humanity that I created from the face of the ground,
from humanity to animals to creeping things and to birds of the skies
for I **regret (נחם)** that I have made them.”

⁸ But **Noah** (נח) found **favor** (חן) in the eyes of Yahweh.

⁹ These are the birth-generations of **Noah** (נח);
Noah (נח) was a righteous one,
 blameless in his generation;
Noah (נח) walked with *Elohim*;
¹⁰ and **Noah** (נח) birthed three sons: Shem, **Ham** (חם), and Japheth.

¹¹ And the land was **ruined** (שחת) before *Elohim*,
 and the land was filled with **violence** (חמס)
¹² and *Elohim* saw the land: and behold,
 it was **ruined** (נשחת) for all flesh had **ruined** (שחת) its/his way upon the land.

¹³ And *Elohim* said to **Noah** (נח) “The end of all flesh has come before me,
 because the land is filled with **violence** (חמס) because of them,
 and behold, I am going to **ruin** (משחית) the land.”

Key Theme Word Associations

Key Theme	Word Associations
comfort/regret (nakh am / ך	Noah (n oa kh / נח) favor (kh e n / חן) ruined (n ish kh at / נשחת)
comfort/regret (na kham / נחם)	purpose (m a kh shevet / מחשבת) wipe away (m a kh ah / מחשבת) Ham (kh a m / חם) violence (kh a m as / חמס) ruin (m ash kh it / משחית)
Genesis 6 Wordplay. Created by Tim Mackie for BibleProject Classroom: Noah to Abraham (2020).	

The wordplay associations are dense and point to the main themes of the flood story as a whole.

Summary: Despite the evil **purposes** and **violence** of humanity that have **ruined** the land, and despite God’s **regret** and his decree to accelerate the **ruin** of the land, God views *Noah*, the man of *rest*, with *favor*, and delivers him to *bring comfort*.

Righteous Noah, a Ruined World, and a Regretful God

The violence in the land is directly connected to the preceding two narratives in 4:1-26 and 6:1-4. Both narratives highlight the role of human and cosmic violence and disorder in the land.

Narrative 1	Narrative 2
Genesis 4:3-16 • Cain murders his brother • Abel’s innocent blood “cries out from the ground”	Genesis 6:5-6, 11-12 ⁵ and Yahweh saw that multiplied was the badness of humanity in the land, and every purpose (מחשבת) of the plans of his heart was only bad all the day, ⁶ and Yahweh regretted (נחם) that he made humanity in the land, and he was pained in his heart. ¹¹ And the land was ruined (שחת) before Elohim, and the land was filled with violence (חמס), ¹² and Elohim saw the land: and behold, it was ruined (נשחת) , for all flesh had ruined (שחת) its/his way upon the land.
Genesis 4:17-26 • Cain’s city • Lemek murders without mercy	
Genesis 6:1-4 • Sons of God commit sexual violence against human women • Nephilim are violent warriors • In the land	
<i>Violence in the Land Preceding Genesis 6:5-6, 11-12. Created by Tim Mackie for BibleProject Classroom: Noah to Abraham (2020).</i>	

Yahweh's decision is one of grief, sadness, and emotional pain. He must respond to the outcry of innocent blood when it soaks the land, so he enacts a decree to purify the land of the defilement of bloodshed. This is a key pattern that runs throughout the Hebrew Bible.

Numbers 35:33-34 NASB

³³ So you shall not **pollute the land** in which you are; for **blood pollutes the land** and no **purification can be made for the land for the blood that is shed on it**, except by the blood of him who shed it. ³⁴ So you shall not **defile the land** in which you live, in the midst of which I dwell; for I the LORD am dwelling in the midst of the sons of Israel.

Two Divine Warnings About the Flood (Gen. 6:13-7:5)

God's speech to Noah comes in two parallel panels that overlap and differ in the way that Hebrew poetic lines do.

Divine Speech #1: Translation and Literary Design of 6:13-22

Command

¹³ And Elohim said to Noah,

Announcement of the Flood

"The end of **all flesh** has come before me,
because the land is filled with violence because of them,
and behold, I am going to ruin them with the land.

Directions for Deliverance by Making the Ark

- a 14 **Make** for yourself **an ark** of **gopher (גפר)** trees;
b you will **make** **the ark** of reeds,
a' and you will **pitch (כפר)** it inside and out with **pitch (כפר)**.

15 This is how you will **make** it:
300 cubits: the length of **the ark**
50 cubits: its width
30 cubits: its height.

- a 16 You will **make** a window for **the ark**,
b' and you will finish it to a cubit from the top;
a' and you will set the door of **the ark** in its side;
b' with lowers, seconds, and thirds you will **make** it.

Announcement of the Flood

17 **And as for me, behold, I am going to** bring the flood of water upon the land,
to ruin all flesh, which has in it the breath of life, from under the skies,
everything that is on the land will expire.

Directions for Deliverance by Entering the Ark

- a 18 **And I will set up my covenant with you [see 9:8-17]**
b and you will **go** into **the ark**,
c you and your sons and your wife, and your sons' wives with you.
c' 19 And of every living thing of **all flesh**,
b' two of everything you will make **go** into **the ark**,
a **to keep them alive** with you;
b they shall be **male and female**,
c 20 **of the birds after their kind**,
c' **and of the animals after their kind**,
c'' **of every creeping thing of the ground after its kind**,
b' **two of every kind** will **go** to you
a' **to keep them alive**.
a 21 And as for you, take for yourself some of all **edible-food** that you will eat,
b' and gather it to yourself;

a' and it shall be for **edible-food** for yourself and for them."

Fulfillment

22 And Noah did
according to all that Elohim had commanded him,
so he did.

Genesis 6:13-22. Translation and Literary Design by Tim Mackie for BibleProject Classroom: Noah to Abraham (2020).

Observations on Speech #1

- The unit begins and ends with a report of command and fulfillment.
- There are two announcements of the flood as a divine initiative, each followed by a call from God to Noah that Noah initiate a response. First to make the ark, the vehicle of his deliverance, and second to fill the ark with his family, the animals, and food.

God's Purpose in Bringing the Flood (Gen. 6:11-13)

As noted in 6:5-7, God's decision to bring the flood was not motivated by anger, but by grief. This portrait is filled out in an important way in 6:11-13, which transitions from the narrative of creation's corruption to God's response and address to Noah.

Point of View	Parallel Statements
Narrator's report of the land's corruption	11 And the land was ruined before <i>Elohim</i>, and the land was filled with violence , 12 and <i>Elohim</i> saw the land: and behold, it was ruined , for all flesh had caused the ruin of its way upon the land.
God's words to Noah recall the narrative report	13 And <i>Elohim</i> said to Noah, "The end of all flesh has come before me, because the land is filled with violence because of them , and behold, I am going to cause their ruin with the land.
<i>God's Purpose in Bringing the Flood. Created by Tim Mackie for BibleProject Classroom: Noah to Abraham (2020).</i>	

Note the parallelism between "all flesh has caused the ruin of its way on the land" and "I am going to cause their ruin with the land." This shows that God's decision to bring the flood is interconnected with the disaster that humans are themselves choosing and perpetuating in the land. God's decision is not imposed from the outside. Rather, his decision is prompted by and works through humanity's self-enacted ruin in the land.

The wording of 6:13 is crucial: "The end of all flesh has come up right in front of me."

[God] “is not the subject of the clause [‘the end has come’] ... the notion is that the demise of all flesh has passed before [God] and so made itself evident. The Hebrew construction distances the deity from the decision making process, almost as if this outcome was inevitable.”

Bandstra, Barry (2008). [*Genesis 1-11: A Handbook on the Hebrew Text*](#). Baylor University Press. 358.

“The [verse] suggests that God has seen where the ruination of creation is headed and has decided to accelerate the process to its completion ... the plain sense of the Hebrew text conveys something very different from most English translations, which are perhaps influenced by the view of an angry, punitive deity. ... The flood was an ancient symbol of destruction and disorder, as so is a fitting medium for the dissolution of creation as it overwhelms every boundary and returns creation to the primordial undifferentiated ‘deep’ that existed before Yahweh spoke boundaries into being. ... We are left with the sense that God is not so much sending the flood to punish the world as much as facilitating, through the flood, the inevitable descent into chaos caused by human destructiveness and violence. God ruins an already ruined creation, and in so doing creates conditions for a reordering and a renewal to take place.”

Hawk, L. Daniel (2018). [*The Violence of the Biblical God: Canonical Narrative and Christian Faith*](#). Eerdmans. 32-33.

Reflection Question

What is God responding to that motivates him to send the flood?

Session 12: Noah the Righteous Remnant

Key Takeaways

- A key concept for understanding the narrative flow of the whole Bible is that the righteousness of one can count for the many. The story of Noah is first time we see this in the Bible.
- The Bible itself provides the questions to interrogate God's character.

Divine Speech #2: Translation and Literary Design of 7:1-5

¹ And Yahweh said to Noah,

“**Go**, **you** and all your household, into **the ark**
for **you** I have seen as a righteous one before me in this generation.

- a ² You will take for yourself
- b **from every pure animal**,
 - c **seven each**, a man and his wife,
 - b' **and from the animal which is not pure**,
 - b' **two each**, a man and his wife,
 - b'' ³ **also from the birds of the skies**,
 - c'' **seven each**, male and female,

- a **to keep alive** seed on the **face of the land**.
- b ⁴ For in **seven days** more,
 - c **I will send rain** on the land
 - b' **forty days** and forty nights;
 - c' **and I will wipe away** every standing-thing that I have made
 - a' from the **face of the land**.”

⁵ And Noah did
according to all that Yahweh had commanded him.

Genesis 7:1-5. Translation and Literary Design by Tim Mackie for BibleProject Classroom: Noah to Abraham (2020).

Observations on Speech #2

- The opening and closing narrative reports correspond in terms of command and fulfillment.
- The three movements of the speech go from Noah’s character, which warrants the following directives, to God’s command that he rescue the animals and keep them alive.
- This speech seems especially tuned into the garden narrative, where humans are both priests and caretakers of the animals, which explains the purity categories that differentiate the animals. Notice also the vocabulary of “causing rain” (7:4 מַמְטִיר) links back to the beginning of the garden narrative (2:2-5 “before there was yet rain”).

Observations on the Relationships Between the Two Speeches

- Both speeches begin with a report of divine speech and end with statements of Noah’s action according to what was commanded.
- Speech #1 begins by focusing on the corruption of the land that warrants the flood of judgment, while speech #2 begins with Noah’s right standing before God.
- Speech #1 alone has instructions for the making of the ark; speech #2 assumes the existence of an ark to enter into.
- Speech #1 directs Noah to bring his family and the animals into the ark. The animals are described in the language of Genesis 1 (“after their kind” and birds/animals/creepers refer back to Gen. 1:21, 24-25). In speech #2, the animals are described in priestly categories using the language of the garden story (“a man and his wife,” “two” refer to Gen. 2:23-24).

Noah the Righteous Remnant

In Genesis 7:1, God reaffirms Noah’s righteous character, which was first stated by the narrator in 6:8-9. But the repetition is strategic because a key narrative moment takes place between the two statements.

Narrator’s Statement	Noah’s Obedience	God’s Statement	
Genesis 6:8-9 Noah found favor in the eyes of Yahweh. Noah was a righteous man , blameless he was in his generations . Noah walked with God.	Genesis 6:13-14 The end of all flesh has come before me, for the land is filled with violence before them ... Make for yourself an ark ...	Genesis 6:22 And Noah did according to everything that Elohim commanded him, so he did it.	Genesis 7:1 Go, you and all your house into the ark, for I have seen that you are righteous before me in this generation .
<i>Noah’s Righteousness.</i> Created by Tim Mackie for BibleProject Classroom: Noah to Abraham (2020).			

Noah’s actions in the intervening narrative connect the narrator’s statement and God’s statement in an action-consequence relationship: Noah was a righteous man already, but God’s command to him was a test to prove his character. Noah passes the test, and God then reaffirms his promise of salvation.

God provides the place of refuge for the righteous remnant.

“[I]t is significant that only immediately before his final entry into the ark did Noah learn of God’s plan to destroy mankind by a flood. Of course, only by this communication could the meaning of the ark and its purpose become clear to him. Therefore, Noah completed the entire structure without knowing God’s intentions; he had only the command which drove him to blind obedience. But that was just Yahweh’s intention—to test Noah. To Noah the command must have seemed strange and incomprehensible. A ship on dry land! That was a test of his obedience and faith. But he passed the test, just as Abraham later followed God’s command implicitly ([Gen. 12:4](#)). ‘By faith Noah being warned by God concerning events as yet unseen, took heed and constructed an ark for the saving of his household.’ ([Heb. 11:7](#)). When one sees that [the narrator] here tells of a test of faith that was passed, then one also understands the judgment which Noah now learns from God’s mouth (i.e., after the command to build and his completion of the building). The [narrator] did not simply assert Noah’s ‘righteousness’ ... but he described it! Unfortunately, we have no satisfactory English word for the theologically significant word *ṣaddīq* (‘righteous’). According to the Old Testament the *ṣaddīq* (‘righteous person’) does justice to a relationship in which he stands. If God abides by his covenant, acts according to the covenant, then he is ‘righteous.’ If a human stands in right relation to God, i.e., believes, trusts God, then he is ‘righteous.’ Righteousness in this sense is not a juridical term of relation, but rather a theological one (see also at Gen. 15:6).”

Von Rad, Gerhard (1973). [Genesis: A Commentary](#). Westminster John Knox Press.

Reflection Question

God rescues Noah’s entire family on account of Noah’s righteous obedience. What does this invite us to consider about God's nature and the way he interacts with people?

Session 13: The Ark as a Symbolic Eden and Tabernacle

Key Takeaways

- The word *tebah*, translated as “ark,” is an Egyptian loanword that means sacred shrine, sarcophagus, or box.
- The ark is a symbolic Eden temple. Its design matches the three-tiered structure of sacred spaces: the garden in Eden, the tabernacle, and the temple.

The Design of Noah’s Ark

“While popular depictions of the ark often mislead one into viewing it as a boat, the vessel, having no sails, rudder, oarsman, etc., was no boat, and Noah was no 'captain' steering his own fate. Indeed, that the ark was completely given over to the sovereign guidance of God seems to be a primary emphasis of the narrative ... [T]he instructions to build the ark in Gen 6:13-17 utilize three times as many verses than for the flood itself, demonstrating ... the emphasis on the ark itself as the means of deliverance. How would ancient readers have understood the ark? Several considerations lead to the conclusion that the ark was meant to be seen as symbolizing a temple.”

Morales, Michael (2012). [*The Tabernacle Pre-Figured: Cosmic Mountain Ideology in Genesis and Exodus*](#). Peeters Publishers. 146-147.

The Word Ark (*Tebah*)

The Hebrew word for Noah’s ark is “*tebah*” (Heb. תבה), and in the Hebrew Bible it appears only in the Genesis flood story and the story of Moses’ deliverance through an ark (*tebah* is usually translated as “basket”).

The rare word *tebah* is actually an Egyptian loanword (*dbt*) into Hebrew, which means “sacred shrine, sarcophagus, box.”

For more information on this word, see Kohler and Baumgartner’s book *The Hebrew and Aramaic Lexicon of the Old Testament* (1,678) and Yoshiyuki Muchiki’s book *Egyptian Proper Names and Loanwords in North-West Semitic* (59).

The sense of “sacred shrine” is significant for the ark’s cultural and symbolic meaning in this story.

"Whereas [the word 'tebah'] is applied to a ship in the flood story (Gen. 6:14), it is being used in its real meaning of 'chest, holy shrine, coffin.' Such a chest generally had the form of a divine shrine, and served as housing for images of gods which were dedicated to temples. Of the numerous shrines which have been preserved several are in stone of different qualities, while others are in plain wood ... The simpler ones ... [had] the form of a longish chest with a small door in the upper portion of the front for statues of gods about the size of a child. Such chests or arks were to be found in all the Egyptian temples from the earliest to the latest times, and they were duly noted by the Greek writers ... On certain festivals as well as on the occasion of great victory fetes they were borne in solemn procession, or were carried on the Nile, from one temple-town to another, on a bier which was usually given the form of a bark, such as was conceived as vehicle for the sun god Re, Osiris, and other gods."

Yahudah, Abraham S. (2003). [*Language of the Pentateuch in its Relation to Egyptian*](#). Kessinger Publishing. 205.

"The word ... 'ark' occurs in only two sections of Scripture: here (Gen. 6:14-15) and in the section that describes the birth and rescue of Moses (Exod. 2:3-5). This is certainly no coincidence. By the verbal parallel, the Torah wished, apparently, to draw attention to the parallelism of theme. In both cases there is to be saved from drowning one who is worthy of salvation and is destined to bring deliverance to others; here it is humanity that is to be saved, there it is the chosen people; here it is the macrocosm that has to be preserved, there it is the microcosm."

Cassuto, Umberto (2012). [*A Commentary on the Book of Genesis: From Noah to Abraham*](#). Varda Books. 59.

The Materials of the Ark

The materials of the ark listed in 6:14 contain a puzzle that is elegantly solved by adopting the translation "reeds" (Heb. *qanim*) instead of "nests/rooms" (Heb. *qinniym*). The most compelling case for this reading has been made by John Day in the chapter titled "Rooms or Reeds in Noah's Ark (Genesis 6:14)?" in his book *From Creation to Babel: Studies in Genesis 1-11* (Day, 2014).

Genesis 6:14 Instructor's Translation

Make for yourself an ark of gopher (גפר) trees
you will make the ark (a) "with nests" OR (b) "of reeds,"
and you will pitch (כפר) it inside and out with pitch (כפר).

The Masoretic Text contains the consonant *q-n-y-m* with the vowel points *qinniym* (קִנִּיִּים) so that the word means "nests." This is the standard Hebrew word for a bird's nest, although it can sometimes be used metaphorically for a human dwelling located high in the hills for security like a nest.

Bird's Nest

Deuteronomy 22:6 NASB

"If you happen to come upon a **bird's nest** along the way, in any tree or on the ground, with young ones or eggs ...

Psalms 84:3 NASB

The bird also has found a house,
and the swallow a **nest** for herself, where she may lay her young,
even your altars, O LORD of hosts,
my King and my God.

See also Deut. 32:11; Job 39:27; Prov. 27:8; Isa. 10:14, 16:12

Human Dwelling Portrayed as a Bird's Nest

Numbers 24:21 NASB*

And he looked at the Cananite (קניזי), and took up his discourse and said,
"Your dwelling place is enduring,
And your **nest** (קן) is set in the cliff.

*Key Words Adapted by Teacher

Obadiah 1:4 NASB

"Though you build high like the eagle,
Though you set your **nest** among the stars,
From there I will bring you down," declares the LORD.

See also Jer. 49:16; Hab. 2:9

While a human dwelling can be likened to a bird's nest, it's clear that the word refers metaphorically to an entire dwelling and that the bird's nest image is part of why the word was chosen. The word does not refer to the particular room of a dwelling in any of the examples in the Hebrew Bible. Therefore, the translation "rooms" is not supported by any contextual evidence. And yet it is the translation adopted by most modern English translations.

There is an overwhelming amount of evidence that the word means "reeds" and was originally vocalized with different vowels, *qaniym* (קניִים), which means "reeds" and is an active word in biblical Hebrew (1 Kgs. 14:15; 2 Kgs. 18:21; Isa. 19:6).

This interpretation is likely for a number of reasons.

- Genesis 6:14 is a three-part description of the materials of the ark. The dimensions and internal design of the ark is briefly described only in 6:15-16. The mention of "rooms" here is out of place.
- Genesis 6:14-16 contains instructions on the topics of materials, dimensions, and design in sequence, and each topic is described in three lines. This makes it likely that the word "*qnym*" is referring to materials.

Pattern	Verse
Materials 1 2 3	14 Make for yourself an ark of gopher (גפר) trees; you will make the ark of reeds, and you will pitch (כפר) it inside and out with pitch (כפר).
Dimensions 1 2 3	15 This is how you will make it: 300 cubits, the length of the ark 50 cubits, its width 30 cubits, its height.
Design 1 2 3	16 You will make a window for the ark, and you will finish it to a cubit from the top; and you will set the door of the ark in its side; with lowers, seconds, and thirds you will make it
Three-Part Descriptions of Material, Dimensions, and Design of the Ark. Created by Tim Mackie for BibleProject Classroom: Noah to Abraham (2020).	

- Genesis 6:14 contains two other Akkadian loanwords, the verb and nouns for “pitch” (*kpr*), instead of the more common Hebrew words for pitch (*khemar*, Gen. 11:3) or “tar” (*zaphet*, Exod. 2:3). It cannot be a coincidence, then, that *qanim* is also an Akkadian word for “reed.”
- In the parallel Mesopotamian flood stories, the arks are made of reed using the Akkadian word “*qa-ne*” (Atrahasis 3.2.11-14). In fact, in these parallel stories, the flood hero uses the reed walls of his hut as the shell of the ark.
- In the design pattern parallel to Noah’s ark, the only other ark (*tebah*) in the Hebrew Bible is Moses’ ark, which his mother makes out of “reeds” (Heb. *gome’* / גומא) (Exod. 2:3). The gopher wood mentioned is therefore the frame of the structure, while the reeds form the actual hull, and the pitch is the caulking.

The Ark as a Symbolic Eden and Tabernacle

The ark is set on analogy with Eden. It is the divinely initiated place of refuge from chaos where humanity lives together in peace with the animals.

The tabernacle is a symbolic micro-Eden and is set on analogy to the ark.

“Both ark and tabernacle are commanded by God, whose precise directions are communicated to the human leader, who proceeds to carry out the directions in obedient detail. Both Noah and Moses found favor in God’s sight (33:12-17; Gen. 6:8). At the end of the building of each (39:42-43; Gen. 6:22) it is said that they did just as God had commanded. The same Hebrew word is used for the ark and for the basket in which Moses, like Noah, was set afloat on the chaotic waters (see at 2:1-10). It has even been suggested that the ark of Noah is a temple structure, similar in construction to those found in Mesopotamia. This is in tune with Christian symbolism of the ark through the ages, which commonly sees it in terms of a church afloat amid the waters of chaos. Floodwaters and wilderness are the two most prominent symbols for chaos in the Old Testament. Both ‘sanctuaries’ are portable, one on sea, one on land; they are used to carry the people through the waters / sands of chaos. Both are viewed as a means by which the people of God can move in a secure and ordered way through a world of disorder on their way to the new creation. It is on the first day of the new year that the floodwaters abate and the covering of the ark is taken off (Gen. 8:13), the same day that the tabernacle is set up and dedicated (Gen. 40:2). One is thereby invited to see the building of the tabernacle in chapters 35-40 in terms of re-creation, God’s beginning again with world / Israel on the far side of apostasy.”

Fretheim, Terence (2010). [*Exodus: Interpretation: A Bible Commentary for Teaching and Preaching*](#). Westminster John Knox Press. 268-269.

“The dimensions of the ark—length, breadth, height—are given according to the standard construction formula found elsewhere in [Exodus 25:10, 17, 23](#) ... At 18 inches or 45 centimeters to the cubit (for precise equivalents, see Roland de Vaux, *Ancient Israel*, 197), the ark was a huge box about 450 ft (135 m) long, 75 ft (22 m) wide, and 45 ft (13 m) high ... The surface area of the ark was thus exactly three times as much as that of the tabernacle courtyard, 100 × 50 cubits (Exod 27:9-13) ... In Exodus 25-31, there are also parallels in phraseology with the directions for building the tabernacle and its furniture that suggest that both ark and tabernacle were seen as a sanctuary for the righteous.”

Wenham, Gordon J. (1987). [Word Biblical Commentary, Vol. 1: Genesis 1-15](#). Thomas Nelson. 172-173.

The vocabulary of the ark instructions and the instructions for the ark of the covenant are remarkably similar and are the only two divinely commanded structures in the Torah.

The Ark of Noah

Genesis 6:14-15 NASB*

¹⁴ Make for yourself an ark (תבה) of wood of gopher (גפר) ... and you will pitch (copher / כפר) it with pitch (copher / כפר), inside and outside (מבית ומחוץ) ... ¹⁵ 300 cubits its length (ארכו), 50 cubits its width (רחבו), and 30 cubits its height (קמתו)

*Key Words Adapted by Teacher

Genesis 6:21 Instructor's Translation

And take for yourself food which will be eaten and gather it ... it will be for you and for them for food (והיה ... לאכזה).

The Ark of the Covenant

Exodus 25:10-11, 17 NIV*

¹⁰ Make an ark (אֲרוֹן) of wood of acacia, two and a half cubits its length (אֶרְכוֹ), a cubit and a half its width (רָחְבוֹ), and a cubit and a half its height (קִמְתּוֹ), ¹¹ and you will overlay it with pure gold, inside and outside (מִבֵּית וּמִחוּץ) ... ¹⁷ Make an atonement cover (capporet / כַּפֶּרֶת) of pure gold, two and a half cubits its length (אֶרְכוֹ), and a cubit and a half its width (רָחְבוֹ).

*Key Words Adapted by Teacher

Exodus 16:15, 33-34 Instructor's Translation

¹⁵ Moses said, "This is the bread which Yahweh gave to you for food (לֶאֱכֹלָה) ... ³³ Take a jar and place in it a full omer of manna, and rest (נָוָה) it before Yahweh ..." ³⁴ So he rested it (נָוָה) before the testimony ...

"While it is possible that the 'pitch' (כפר) might alert a well-educated ancient reader to an Akkadian loan-word, it might equally evoke the rich cultic overtones of 'ransom' (כפר), 'the atonement cover' (כפרת), and the verb 'to atone' (כפר) that is associated with so many priestly rituals. The *tebah* becomes the place of mercy and ransom when the waters cover over and atone for the violence of the world."

Harper, Elizabeth A. (2021). "You Shall Make a Tebah." Academia.edu.

Noah's Ark as an Idealized Temple

In the ancient Mesopotamian flood account of Gilgamesh, the description of the ark fits precisely with the iconic shape of an ancient ziggurat, a temple that symbolized the cosmic mountain.

"The ark of Utnapishtim was intended to symbolically represent a ziggurat ... that is to say, it is the architectural embodiment of the cosmic mountain ... the curious design of this ark, far from being the random escapade of creative imagination, depicted a symbol that was fluent and integral to the religious language of ancient Mesopotamia."

Holloway, Steven W. (1991). "What Ship Goes There: The Flood Narratives in the Gilgamesh Epic and Genesis Considered in Light of Ancient Near Eastern Temple Ideology." *Zeitschrift für die alttestamentliche Wissenschaft*, Volume 103. 339.

- The equal length, width, and height makes us think of a giant cube, but notice the later detail of "six decks" and "seven divisions." This describes the form of a ziggurat, whose height equaled its square width and then had six steps, each with a deck and seven divisions with a smaller top.
- He offers a sacrificial offering atop the mountain where the ark has landed.

When one compares the very brief descriptions of the ark in Genesis 6:14-16 with the longer, but also brief, descriptions of Solomon's temple in Jerusalem, a number of features leap off the page.

The dimensions are listed in the same order.

Genesis 6:15 Instructor's Translation

This is how you will make it:
300 cubits, the length of the ark

50 cubits, its width
30 cubits, its height.

1 Kings 6:2 Instructor's Translation

And the house that king Solomon built for Yahweh
60 cubits, its length
20 cubits, its width
30 cubits, its height.

The arrangement of the measurements is the same, but they only share the same height (30 cubits). However, if one takes the additional measurements given in 1 Kings 6:5-6 that account for the “side chambers” and the “stories” that terraced down to the courtyard, the entire structure would be around 100 cubits long and 50 cubits wide. For more information, see Cory Crawford’s “Noah’s Architecture” (6-7) and Steven Holloway’s “What Ship Goes There?” (202).

Both accounts, which are spare in detail, draw attention to the door (פתח).

Genesis 6:16 NASB*

and you will set the **door** (פתח) of the ark in its **side** (צדה)

*Key Words Adapted by Teacher

1 Kings 6:8 NASB*

The **door** (פתח) of the lower **side** (צלע) was on the right side of the temple ...

*Key Words Adapted by Teacher

“In 1 Kings 6:8 the entrance to the three-decker structure is specifically noted as being on the right side of the house, just as Gen. 6:16 famously places the door of the three decker ark in its side. The note in Genesis has perhaps most blatantly raised exegetical questions about the seaworthiness of Noah’s vessel ... In these texts, both of which are spare in detail relative to other building accounts, it is striking that the side door should be clearly indicated in close conjunction with similar terminology.”

Crawford, C.D. (2013). “Noah’s Architecture: The Role of Sacred Space in Ancient Near Eastern Flood Myths.” *Constructions of Space IV: Further Developments in Examining Ancient Israel’s Social Space*. Bloomsbury T & T Clark. 7.

Both structures are three-tiered, which was a common architectural feature used in ancient Near Eastern temples to symbolize the three-tiered cosmos (heavens, land, waters).

Genesis 6:16 Instructor's Translation

You will make it with **lower [floors]** (תחתים), **second** (שנים), and **third** (שלשים).

1 Kings 6:5-6 Instructor's Translation

And he made side chambers all around the **lower** (תחתים) ... and the **middle** (שנים) ... and the **third** (שלשים).

"The ark functions as a substitute cosmos and refuge from the destruction of the ordered world. And once this mini-world is made, such that it is suitable for inhabitants, it is filled up with living creatures: wildlife, herd-animals, creepers, birds, humans, so that it is a creation in miniature ... Noah's three-decked ark, symbolizing a temple, constitutes a microcosm of 'the heavens and the earth,' with living creatures to boot."

Morales, Michael (2012). [*The Tabernacle Pre-Figured: Cosmic Mountain Ideology in Genesis and Exodus*](#). Peeters Publishers. 152.

"In their basic design both Noah's ark and Solomon's temple reflect the three-decker world of ancient Near Eastern cosmogonies, a feature which, for fairly obvious reasons, could not be reproduced in the wilderness sanctuary. In light of the ziggurat symbolism in the Mesopotamian flood narrative, it is unlikely that chance could account for the correspondence in dimensional proportions and structure between Noah's ark and the Solomonic temple."

Holloway, Steven W. (1991). "What Ship Goes There: The Flood Narratives in the Gilgamesh Epic and Genesis Considered in Light of Ancient Near Eastern Temple Ideology." *Zeitschrift für die alttestamentliche Wissenschaft*, Volume 103. 339.

Both structures are completed with the same vocabulary.

Genesis 6:16 NASB*

and to the cubit **you shall complete it** (כלה) from above

*Key Words Adapted by Teacher

1 Kings 6:9 NASB*

And he built the house and **he completed it** (כלה).

*Key Words Adapted by Teacher

"Explaining the literary appearance of the flood vessels as products of cultural notions of sacred space best accounts for the striking differences between the flood vessels in each tradition. It allows the use of a similar conceptual framework—the congruence of flood vessel and monumental sacred architecture—to be applied to different cultural forms, for Israel, its temple, and for Babylon, the ziqqurat. This observation allows us to reject the pejorative analyses of Mesopotamian ark construction discussed above, which saw little value in the "unrealistic" use of "fanciful" proportions and championed the biblical dimensions as more realistic than those in Gilgamesh. If the affiliation of ark and temple is correct, the Mesopotamian and biblical texts exemplify equivalent phenomena: the different dimensions given in each are the result of different architectural realities, rather than some other aesthetic or nautical rationale."

Crawford, C.D. (2013). "Noah's Architecture: The Role of Sacred Space in Ancient Near Eastern Flood Myths." *Constructions of Space IV: Further Developments in Examining Ancient Israel's Social Space*. Bloomsbury T & T Clark. 11.

Ark as Temple as Yahweh's Presence

The ark as temple as Yahweh's presence connection was picked up and developed by later biblical authors in very creative ways.

Psalm 32:6-7 NASB

⁶ Therefore, let everyone who is godly pray to you in a time when you may be found; surely in a flood of great waters, they will not reach him.

⁷ You are my hiding place; you preserve me from trouble; you surround me with songs of deliverance. Selah.

Psalm 29:9-10 NASB*

⁹ ... in Yahweh's temple everything says, "Glory!"

¹⁰ Yahweh sat enthroned at the flood; yes, Yahweh sits as King forever.

*Key Words Adapted by Teacher

Psalm 46:1-5 NASB

¹ God is our refuge and strength,
a very present help in trouble.

² Therefore we will not fear,
though the earth should change
and though the mountains slip into the heart of the sea;

³ though its waters roar and foam,
though the mountains quake at its swelling pride. Selah.

⁴ There is a river whose streams make glad the city of God,
the holy dwelling places of the Most High.

⁵ God is in the midst of her, she will not be moved;
God will help her when morning dawns.

Isaiah 8:7-8 NASB

⁷ Now therefore, behold, the Lord is about to bring on them the strong and abundant waters of the Euphrates,
even the king of Assyria and all his glory;
and it will rise up over all its channels and go over all its banks.

⁸ Then it will sweep on into Judah, it will overflow and pass through,
it will reach even to the neck;
and the spread of its wings will fill the breadth of your land, O Immanuel.

Isaiah 8:13-14 NASB

¹³ It is the LORD of hosts whom you should regard as holy.
And he shall be your fear,
and he shall be your dread.

¹⁴ Then he shall become a sanctuary;
but to both the houses of Israel, a stone to strike and a rock to stumble over,
and a snare and a trap for the inhabitants of Jerusalem.

"[The] ark was designed to be a replica of the cosmos conceptualized as a three-storied house of God, the temple residence of God (Isa. 66:1). Besides the three-stories structure, the door and window are mentioned as architectural features of the ark, and these too have counterparts in the cosmic creation house with its window of heaven (see [Gen. 7:11](#); [8:2](#)) and the door of the deep (see [Job 38:8-11](#)), both access points for the flood waters. As in the case of other replicas of the heavenly sanctuary, like the tabernacle and temple as well as the visible cosmos, so in the case of this ark-house, it was God who provided the architectural plans (Gen. 6:14-16) ... Accordingly, the ark, with its prototypically glorified occupants, was a typological symbol of the consummate cosmic holy city as well as the cosmic heavenly temple."

Kline, Meredith (2006). [*God, Heaven, and Har Magedon: A Covenantal Tale of Cosmos and Telos*](#). Wipf and Stock. 87-89.

Reflection Question

In what way does the design of the ark reflect the description of the garden in Eden? How does the design reflect descriptions of the tabernacle and the temple?

Session 14: Reflecting on the Ark as a Symbolic Eden

Key Takeaways

- God's deliverance of the righteous from the waters is a common image throughout the Bible.
- The author of Genesis 19 wove in themes, words, and phrases from earlier stories to connect Lot's story with the others and to provide an additional layer of commentary.
- The transfiguration presents Jesus as the greater Noah and the greater David—the one who opens the way back to the mountain of God.



This session has no other notes

Reflection Question

Consider how the biblical authors weave elements of Noah's story into the tapestry of the larger story of the messiah. Where else do you see Noah's themes (high places, the righteous one who offers a sacrifice, being saved through the waters) in the rest of the Bible?



Module 4: The Flood

SESSIONS 15-19

The flood waters have arrived. Explore what the flood itself meant in the ancient context of this story and what came after the flood.

Session 15: The Flood as Cosmic Collapse

Key Takeaways

- The cosmology of the ancient biblical authors—three tiers: waters below, the dry land, and waters above—is crucial to understanding the meaning of the flood.
- The language that's describing the flood is describing neither a local flood nor a global flood. It's describing the collapse of the cosmos—cosmic collapse.
- In the biblical cosmology, the waters above the *raqia'* are still there. God's ongoing, sustaining work of creation is to keep the order of this cosmos from collapsing in chaos.

The Flood Begins and Noah Enters the Ark (Gen. 7:6-16)

The beginning of the flood and Noah's entrance into the ark take place in two parallel panels, each highlighting different features of this part of the story.

Flood Panel #1: Translation and Literary Design of Genesis 7:6-10

6 And Noah was six hundred years old , and the flood of waters came upon the land .

a 7 And he went ,
b Noah
c and his sons
b' and his wife
c' and his sons' wives
b' with him
a' into the ark

because of the waters of the flood .

a 8 From the pure animals
a and from the animals that are not pure
b and from the birds
b' and from everything that creeps on the ground,
c 9 two by two they went
to Noah ,
d

d' into the ark ,
c' male and female,
e just as Elohim had commanded Noah.

10 And it came about after the seven days and the waters of the flood were upon the land .

Genesis 7:6-10. Translation and Literary Design by Tim Mackie for BibleProject Classroom: Noah to Abraham (2020).

Flood Panel #2: Translation and Literary Design of Genesis 7:11-16

11 In the six hundredth year of Noah's life , in the second month,
on the seventeenth day of the month, on that day

- a they were split apart (נבקעו)
 - b all the fountains of the great deep ,
 - b' and the windows of the skies
- a they were opened (נפתחו),
 - a 12 and there was rain upon the land
 - b for forty days and forty nights.

13 On that very day

- a he went
 - b Noah
 - c and Shem and Ham and Japheth ,
 - c' the sons of Noah ,
 - b' and Noah's wife
 - c' and the three wives of his sons
 - b' with them,
- a' into the ark .

-
- a' 14 They
 - b and every living creature after its kind,
 - b' and all the beast after their kind,
 - b' and every creeper that creeps on the land after its kind,
 - b' and every bird after its kind,
 - c every bird of every wing.
 - a 15 And they went
 - b to Noah, into the ark,

c two by two,
 d from all flesh in which was the breath of life,
 a' 16 and those going,
 c' were male and female
 d' from all flesh,
 a' they went
 e just as Elohim had commanded him;

and Yahweh closed behind him.

Genesis 7:11-16. Translation and Literary Design by Tim Mackie for BibleProject Classroom: Noah to Abraham (2020).

The Flood as Cosmic Collapse

The Waters Above and Below

The description of the flood uses cosmic imagery that corresponds to Genesis 1, and this makes it clear the flood is also a de-creation story that undoes the order established in Genesis 1.

Genesis 7:11 Instructor's Translation

They were **split apart** (נבקעו)
 all the fountains of the great deep,
 and the windows of the skies
 they were **opened** (נפתחו).

The two water sources correspond exactly to the “waters below” and the “waters above” in Genesis chapter 1.

Genesis 1:2 Instructor's Translation

Now, the land was wild and waste (*tohu va-vohu* / תהו ווהו)
 and darkness was over the face of the deep abyss (*tehom* / תהום),
 but the breath of Elohim was hovering over the face of the waters (*hamayim* / המים).

Genesis 1:6-8 NASB*

Then God said, “Let there be a dome in the midst of the waters, and let it separate **the waters** from the **waters.**” God made the dome, and separated **the waters which were below the dome** from **the waters which were above the dome;** and it was so. God called the dome “heavens/skies.” And there was evening and there was morning, a second day.

*Key Words Adapted by Teacher

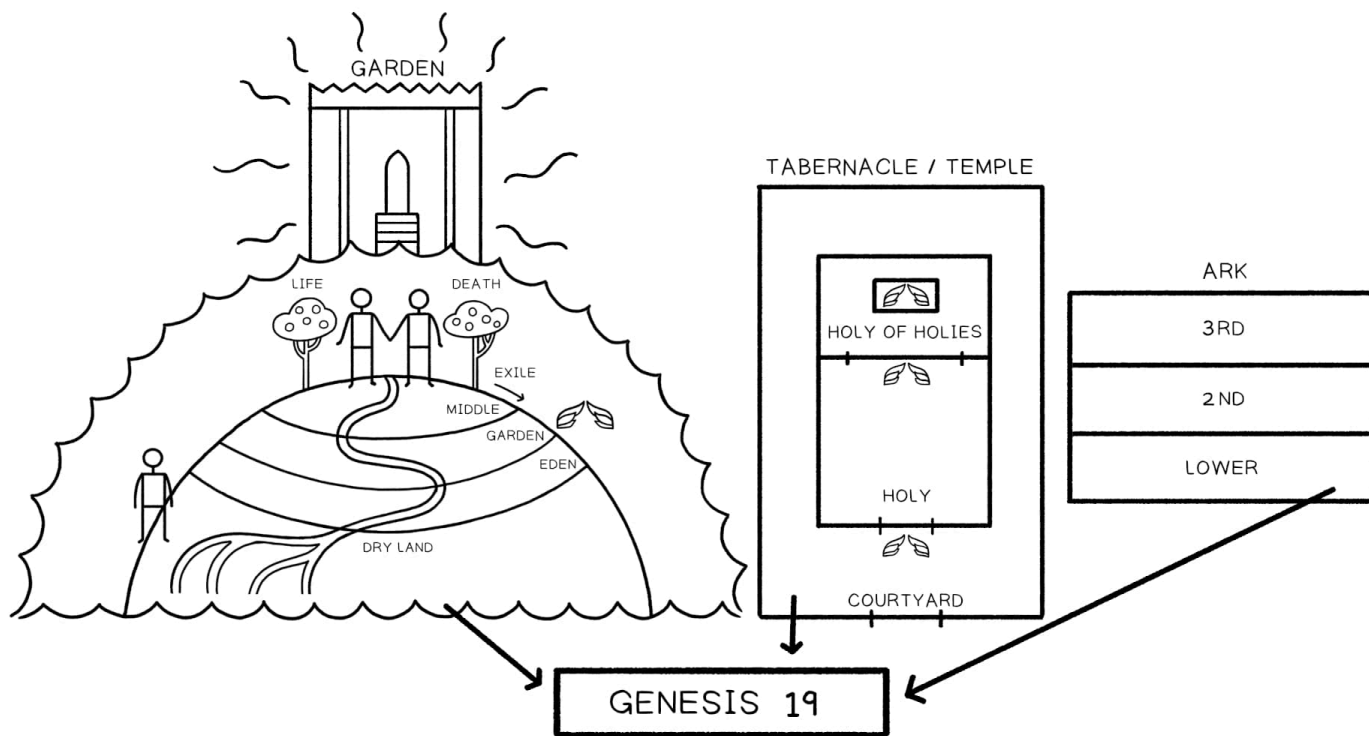
Psalms 104 and 148 are poetic explorations of the cosmology of Genesis 1, summoning every tier of creation and all their inhabitants to praise the creator.

Psalms 104:1-3 NASB

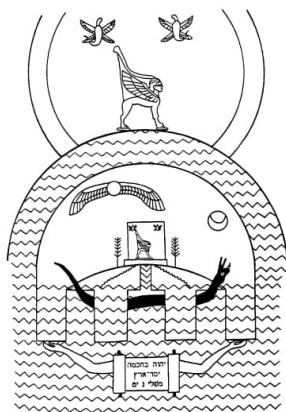
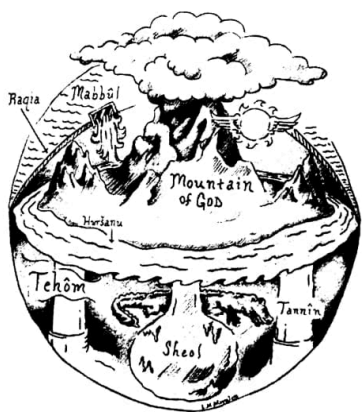
¹ Bless the LORD, O my soul!
O LORD my God, you are very great;
you are clothed with splendor and majesty,
² covering yourself with light as with a cloak,
stretching out heaven like a tent curtain.
³ **He lays the beams of his upper chambers in the waters;**
he makes the clouds his chariot;
he walks upon the wings of the wind.

Psalms 148:1-6 NASB

¹ Praise the LORD!
Praise the LORD from the heavens;
praise him in the heights!
² Praise him, all his angels;
praise him, all his hosts!
³ Praise him, sun and moon;
praise him, all stars of light!
⁴ Praise him, **highest heavens,**
and the waters that are above the heavens!
⁵ Let them praise the name of the LORD,
for he commanded and they were created.
⁶ He has also established them forever and ever;
he has made a decree which will not pass away.



Three-tiered Temple Connections. Illustration created by Tim Mackie for BibleProject Classroom: Noah to Abraham (2020).



Left: Morales, L. Michael (2015). *Who Shall Ascend the Mountain of the Lord?: A Biblical Theology of the Book of Leviticus*. IVP Academic. Middle: Keel, Othmar (1997). "Figure 14." *Symbolism of the Biblical World: Ancient Near Eastern Iconography and the Book of Psalms*. Eisenbrauns. 161. Right: Walton, John H. (2004). *Old Testament Today: A Journey from Original Meaning to Contemporary Significance*. Zondervan.

When the biblical cosmology is taken into consideration, the flood is a portrait of God's "release" of the order he established in Genesis 1, so that the cosmos collapses in on itself.

"In ... Genesis 1, the reader is introduced to a world in which watery chaos rules supreme until God's intervention brings order ... The flood account in Genesis 6-8 tells the story of how, when the world was corrupted, God withdrew the restraints placed on the waters at the time of creation, and they flooded the world once more from the "great deep" (*tehom rabbah*) and the "windows of the heavens" (*'arubot hashamayim*) ... Thus, the chaos waters by their very nature are symbolic of the absence of order and creation. In the flood narrative, they denote the reversal of creation."

Rudman, Dominic (2001). "Mitteilungen: The Use of Water Imagery in Descriptions of Sheol." *Zeitschrift Für Die Alttestamentliche Wissenschaft*, Volume 113 (2). 240-244.

The Word "Flood"

Our English translation "flood" for the Hebrew word *mabbul* (מבול) is not quite correct. The word *mabbul* is the technical term for the heavenly waters above the sky-dome (see the notes above). The word is used 13 times in the Hebrew Bible, and 12 of them are in Genesis 1-11 as references to the flood.

However, in Psalm 29, *mabbul* is still in the heavens long after the flood, and Yahweh rules over it.

Psalm 29:3, 9-10 NIV*

³ The voice of the LORD **is over the waters**;
the God of glory thunders,
the LORD **is over the great waters**.

⁹ ... in his temple everything says, "Glory!"

¹⁰ The LORD **sits as King of the mabbul**;
yes, the LORD sits as King forever.

*Key Words Adapted by Teacher

"*Mabbul* does not mean 'flood,' 'inundation,' or even 'destruction,' but it is a technical term for a part of the world structure, namely, the heavenly ocean. This heavenly sea, which is above the firmament (*raqia'*), empties downward through latticed windows (Gen. 7:11). Here we have the same realistic and cosmological ideas as in Gen. ch. 1 ... [T]he Flood, therefore, is a catastrophe involving the entire cosmos. When the heavenly ocean breaks forth upon the earth below, and the primeval sea beneath the earth, which is restrained by God, now freed from its bonds, gushes up through yawning chasms onto the earth, then there is a destruction of the entire cosmic system according to biblical cosmogony. The two halves of the chaotic primeval sea, separated—the one up, the other below—by God's creative government (ch. 1:7-9), are again united; creation begins to sink again into chaos. Here the catastrophe, therefore, concerns not only men and beasts ... but the earth (chs. 6:13; 9:11)—indeed, the entire cosmos."

von Rad, Gerhard (1973). [*Genesis: A Commentary*](#) (rev.). Westminster John Knox Press. 128.

Entrance Into the Ark = Entrance Into the New Jerusalem

The Eden/ark/tabernacle/temple parallels make it clear that this narrative is about entering the divinely provided sanctuary to escape the disintegration of creation back into disorder.

- Notice the emphasis on the word "go/went/enter," which all translate the Hebrew word *bo* (בוא).

- This repetition recalls the unique emphasis put upon the “door/entrance” (Heb. *petakh* / פתח), which is the means of entering into the divine refuge.
- It also recalls Noah’s “righteous and blameless” moral character (Gen. 6:9 and 7:1).

This entire collection of themes will be developed later in the Hebrew Bible. Righteous Noah’s entrance into the ark becomes an archetype of David’s desire to take refuge in the temple and of the righteous remnant’s longing to enter the temple on the day of Yahweh.

Psalm 15:1-2 NASB*

¹ O LORD, who may abide in your tent?
Who may tabernacle on your holy hill?
² He who walks with **blamelessness** (*tamim*),
and does what is **right** (*tsedeq*),
and speaks truth in his heart.

*Key Words Adapted by Teacher

Psalm 24:1-10 NASB*

¹ The land is Yahweh's, and all it contains,
the world, and those who dwell in it.
² For he has founded it upon the seas
and established it upon the rivers.
³ Who may ascend into the hill of Yahweh?
And who may stand in his holy place?
⁴ He who has clean hands and a **pure heart**,
who has not lifted up his soul to falsehood
and has not sworn deceitfully.
⁵ He shall receive a blessing from the LORD
and **righteousness** from the God of his salvation.
⁶ This is **the generation** of those who seek him,
who seek your face—even Jacob. Selah.
⁷ Lift up your heads, **O doors**,
and be lifted up, **O ancient doors**,
that the King of glory may come in!
⁸ Who is the King of glory?
Yahweh strong and mighty,
Yahweh mighty in battle.
⁹ Lift up your heads, **O doors**,
and lift them up, **O ancient doors**,
that the King of glory may come in!
¹⁰ Who is this King of glory?
Yahweh of armies,
he is the King of glory. Selah.

*Key Words Adapted by Teacher

"The ark/tabernacle parallels extend beyond their construction to the emphasis placed on the conditionality of their being entered. Leviticus 1:3 states that "unblemished" (*tamim*) animals may be presented at the 'entrance' (*petakh*) of the tent of meeting before Yahweh. As the tabernacle/temple is an architectural cosmic mountain, entrance into the holy of holies symbolizes ascent to the summit of God's holy mountain. The question of 'who shall ascend' in Psalm 15 [and Noah's entrance into the ark] is linked to the Day of Atonement."

Morales, Michael (2012). [*The Tabernacle Pre-Figured: Cosmic Mountain Ideology in Genesis and Exodus*](#). Peeters Publishers. 173.

Isaiah 26:1-4 NASB*

¹ In that day this song will be sung in the land of Judah:

"We have **a strong city**;

he sets up walls and ramparts for security.

² **Open the doors, that the righteous nation may enter, the one that remains faithful.**

³ The steadfast of mind you will keep in perfect peace, because he trusts in you.

⁴ Trust in Yahweh forever, for in God Yahweh, **we have an everlasting rock.**"

*Key Words Adapted by Teacher

Isaiah 26:20-21 NASB*

²⁰ Come, my people, **enter into your rooms and close your doors behind you;**

hide for a little while

until indignation passes over.

²¹ For behold, Yahweh is about to come out from his place to punish the iniquity of the inhabitants of the land;

and the land will reveal its shed blood, and will no longer cover its slain.

*Key Words Adapted by Teacher

For more flood allusions, see [Isaiah 24:5-6](#), [17-20](#); [25:3-10](#)

"[In Isaiah chapters 24-27,] Noah as the righteous world citizen par excellence becomes the leadmotif of those who escape the world judgment; the redemption of the righteous from the primeval flood is the paradigm for the redemption of the righteous from final judgment. It is no longer ethnic membership in Israel, but rather ethical behavior that is the measuring rod of salvation ... At the center of the 'strong city' stands the righteous who may enter through its doors. These are Yahweh worshippers from all nations coming to the temple (thus the allusions to the temple entrance liturgies of [Psalms 15](#) and [24](#)). In the same way that Noah, the exemplary righteous person, goes into the ark (Gen. 7:1-6), so the 'righteous nation' marches into the new Jerusalem ... Just as Yahweh closes the door before the waters (Gen. 7:16), so now his people close the doors behind themselves for a little while."

Berges, Ulrich (2012). [*The Book of Isaiah: Its Composition and Final Form*](#). Sheffield Phoenix Press. 175-177.

Reflection Question

To understand the flood story, does it help us to know the cosmology of the biblical authors? If so, how? And what does the flood story have to do with day two of creation in Genesis 1?

Session 16: The Flood Overwhelms the Land

Key Takeaways

- The remnant suffering through chaos in a divinely provided refuge is an image that the biblical authors will use repeatedly to illustrate God's plan of rescue.
- The biblical authors confront feelings of anger, abandonment, and grief. Texts like the Psalms serve as a guide for dealing with negative emotions before God.

The Flood Overwhelms the Land: Translation and Literary Design of Genesis 7:17-24

A 17 And the flood was forty days
upon the land,
and the waters were great (רבה)

B and they lifted up the ark,
and it rose up over the land .

A' 18 And the waters were mighty (גבר) ,
and they were very great (רבה)
upon the land ,

B' and the ark went on the face of the waters .

A 19 And the waters were mighty (גבר) ,
very very much,
upon the land ,

B and they covered all the high mountains which are under the skies,

A' 20 fifteen cubits above,

the waters were mighty (גבר) ,

and they covered the mountains .

21 And all flesh expired ,

what creeps on the land
with the birds
and with the beasts
and with the living creatures,
and with all the swarmers that swarm upon the land,
and all humanity,
22 all that had the inhalation of the breath of life in its nostrils,
from all that was on the dry land,

they died .

23 And he wiped away every standing-thing
that was upon the face of the land,

from humanity
to animals
to creepers
and to birds of the skies,

and they were wiped away from the land;

and only Noah was left remaining,
and those with him in the ark.

24 And the waters were mighty (גבר)
upon the land
one hundred and fifty days .

Genesis 7:17-24. Translation and Literary Design by Tim Mackie for BibleProject Classroom: Noah to Abraham (2020).

Notice the twin-panel composition; each one consists of an opening and closing frame around matching internal parts. It's designed as a poetic piece of epic narrative moving the story forward in graded steps to focus the reader's attention on the emphasized themes.

The “Mighty Waters”

- The verb “be mighty” (Heb. *gabar* / גַּבַּר) is the same root as “mighty warrior” (Heb. *gibbor* / גִּבּוֹר), a word that is featured in the twin introduction to the flood story (Gen. 6:4). The waters are not simply a cosmic de-creation but also a measure-for-measure response to the violence and bloodshed perpetrated by the “mighty warriors” of Genesis 6:4.
- The mighty warriors unleashed chaos and violent death into God’s good world, and so he released the mighty waters to both judge their evil and purify his creation from the defilement of bloodshed.

The Mountains and the Measurement

- The small detail in Genesis 7:20 that the waters rose 15 cubits above the highest mountain is almost certainly given in order to explain why the ark could run aground on a submerged mountaintop before the waters subsided.
- The ark’s measurements showed that it was 30 cubits high, and much of that would be underwater. And so the ark’s bottom could only have run aground on a mountain if it was 15 cubits below the water.

The Pivot: God Remembers Noah: Translation and Literary Design of Genesis 8:1

a 8:1 And Elohim remembered

b Noah
and all the living creatures
and all the beasts that were with him in the ark;

a and Elohim caused to pass

b a Spirit/wind to cover the land

c and the waters subsided.

Genesis 8:1. Translation and Literary Design by Tim Mackie for BibleProject Classroom: Noah to Abraham (2020).

These two statements are the literary pivot of the entire flood narrative. They shift the story’s focus from cosmic disorder and death to rebirth and new order. Each of these statements is worded so as to reach forward and backward through design patterns in the entire Hebrew Bible.

And God Remembered

After God has handed humanity and the cosmos over to disorder, the act of new creation begins with God “remembering,” that is, recalling, his promise to Noah. This line reaches back to God’s promise to Noah in Genesis 6:17-19.

Genesis 6:17-19 **Instructor's Translation**

¹⁷ And behold, I am going to bring the flood of water upon the land, to ruin all flesh, which has in it the breath of life, from under the skies, everything that is on the land will expire,

¹⁸ and **I will set up my covenant with you**; and you will go into the ark you and your sons and your wife, and your sons’ wives with you.

¹⁹ and of every living creature of all flesh ...

God’s remembering is stage one of the fulfillment of God’s promise to rescue Noah and bring him and those with him through the waters of death.

This narrative sets the paradigm for God’s reliable commitment to his covenant promises, even when human evil has unleashed hurt and chaos into his world. Future iterations of this pattern draw upon the flood narrative, often in very creative ways.

Human Evil and God’s Deliverance Begins	“God Remembered”	Deliverance
The Flood • Human evil “ruins” (שחת) the land, God “ruins” (שחת) creation with the flood (Gen 6:5-12) • The ark (התבה) is the means of deliverance from the flood of judgment • God delivers Noah and those with him	Gen. 8:1: And God remembered Noah and all the living creatures and all the beasts that were with him in the ark	Gen. 8:4: The arks rests on Mt. Ararat, and Noah offers his sacrifice of thanks
Sodom & Gomorrah • The men of Sodom attempt to gang rape the angels • Lot’s house (הבית) and door (פתח) are the means of	Gen. 19:29: Thus it came about, when God destroyed the cities of the valley, that God remembered Abraham , and sent Lot out of the midst of the	Lot went up from Zoar, and stayed on the mountain, and sleeps with his daughters while drunk
<i>The Pattern of Human Evil and God’s Deliverance. Created by Tim Mackie for BibleProject Classroom: Noah to Abraham (2020).</i>		

Human Evil and God's Deliverance Begins	"God Remembered"	Deliverance
deliverance from the flood of evil • God announces to "ruin" (שחת, Gen. 19:13) the city, but deliver Lot	overthrow, when he overthrew the cities in which Lot lived.	
Rachel and Leah • Laban is manipulating and oppressing Jacob through deception • God "opens the door" (פתח) of Leah's womb, unleashing a flood of children and rivalry with Rachel	Gen. 30:22: Then God remembered Rachel; he listened to her	Gen. 30:22b: and God opened the door (פתח) of her womb, and she conceived and gave birth to a son, and she said, "God has gathered up my shame." And she called him Joseph.
The Exodus • The Israelites are enslaved and oppressed in Egypt • The sons of Israel are thrown into the waters of death • Moses is delivered through an ark (התבה)	Exod. 2:23–25: And the sons of Israel groaned because of the bondage, and they cried out; and their cry for help because of their bondage rose up to God. And God heard their groaning; and God remembered his covenant with Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob. God saw the sons of Israel, and God took notice of them.	God reveals himself to Moses on a mountain and sends him to deliver Israel from Egypt
Passover • Pharaoh resists the flood of judgment in the nine plagues • The final plague is the inversion of Pharaoh's slaughter of Israelite firstborn in the Nile • The plague is carried out by the "one who ruins/destroyer" (שחת, Exod. 12:23) • Blood is applied to the door (פתח,) of the house (הבית) which should not be exited (Exod. 12:22-23)	Exod. 12:14: And today will be for you a remembrance, and you will celebrate a celebration to Yahweh Exod. 12:23: And Yahweh will pass through to strike Egypt, and he will see the blood ... and Yahweh will pass-over the door and will not let the destroyer enter your houses	The Israelites "go out" of Egypt (Exod. 12:31) to pass through the wilderness on the way to the promised land

The Pattern of Human Evil and God's Deliverance. Created by Tim Mackie for BibleProject Classroom: Noah to Abraham (2020).

Reflection Question

Discuss the ways people might end up feeling like God has forgotten or abandoned them. When you see God remembering Noah, what comes to mind from your own experience of life?

Session 17: The Flood Waters Recede

Key Takeaways

- The restoration of people and animals to the land after the flood is both a re-creation and a new creation.
- Creation in the biblical imagination is about more than where things began; it’s about the transition from non-order to order and the transition from death to life.
- Noah, his family, and the animals exit the ark on the first day of the calendar—the new creation coinciding with the start of the year. This pattern recurs throughout Scripture.

God’s New Creation Spirit-Wind

The image of God’s *ruakh* (רוח) blowing over the watery chaos links back to Genesis 1:2.

Genesis 8:1 Instructor's Translation

And *Elohim* caused a ***ruakh*** to pass over the land, and **the waters** subsided.

Genesis 1:2 Instructor's Translation

Now, the land was wild and waste
and darkness was over the face of the deep abyss
but the ***ruakh*** of *Elohim* was hovering over the face of **the waters**.

This is the first allusion in a network of allusions to Genesis 1. All these allusions portray the recession of the waters as a re-creation narrative on analogy with Genesis 1. Joshua Berman shows how nearly all of the narrative elements in Genesis 8-9 adapt vocabulary from Genesis 1 in the precise order of the days of creation.

Day		Creation: Genesis 1	Re-Creation: Genesis 8-9	
First Day	1:2	• The land was wild and waste • Darkness over the deep (<i>tehom</i>) • And the <i>ruakh</i> of <i>Elohim</i> was hovering over the waters	8:1b–2a	• And <i>Elohim</i> caused a <i>ruakh</i> to pass over and the land, and the waters receded
Genesis 8-9 Re-Creation. Adapted from Berman, Joshua (2017). <i>Inconsistency in the Torah</i> . Oxford University Press. By BibleProject for Classroom: Noah to Abraham (2020).				

Day	Creation: Genesis 1		Re-Creation: Genesis 8-9	
Second Day	1:6–8	• Separation of the waters above and the waters below	8:2b	• And the springs of the deep and the windows of the heavens were closed
Third Day	1:9	• Water gathered into one place and the dry ground appeared • Vegetation comes out of the ground	8:3–5, 11	• Waters return from the land and the tops of the mountains appeared • Dove returns with fresh olive branch
Fourth Day	1:14-19	• Sun and moon appointed to rule the boundaries of morning and evening	8:11	• Dove returns at time of evening
Fifth Day	1:20	• Let birds fly above the earth against the face of the sky dome	8:12	• Dove leaves the ark to return to the sky and land
Sixth Day	1:24	• Creation of living creatures, livestock, creepers on the ground	8:17	• Animals leave the ark, living creatures, livestock, creepers on the ground
	1:26	• Human is the image of God	9:6	• Human is the image of God
	1:29	• “There will be food for you”	9:3	• “There will be food for you”
Seventh Day	2:1-3	• “God rested” (<i>shabbat</i>) • “God blessed”	8:4, 22 9:1	• The ark “rested” (<i>nuakh</i>) • God “blessed” • The seasons “will not rest” (<i>shabbat</i>)
Genesis 8-9 Re-Creation. Adapted from Berman, Joshua (2017). <i>Inconsistency in the Torah</i> . Oxford University Press. By BibleProject for Classroom: Noah to Abraham (2020).				

The Flood Waters Recede from the Land: Translation and Literary Design of Genesis 8:2-5

The recession of the flood waters is described as the inversion of the flood’s beginning.

- a ² And **they were closed**,
- b the **fountains of the deep**
- b' and **the windows of the skies**,
- a **and it was restrained**,
- b' the rain **from the skies**.

- a ³ And **the waters turned back** from upon the land,
- b going back and **the waters decreased**
- c at the end of one hundred and fifty days,

- a ⁴ and **the ark rested**,
- b in the seventh month,
- b' on the seventeenth day of the month,
- a' **upon the mountains of Ararat**.

- a ⁵ And **the waters were going and decreasing**
- b until the tenth month;
- b' in the tenth month,
- b'' on the first day of the month,
- a **the heads of the mountains** became visible.

Genesis 8:2-5. Translation and Literary Design by Tim Mackie for BibleProject Classroom: Noah to Abraham (2020).

The Flood Reversed

This description is designed to precisely reverse the vocabulary and narrative movement of the waters’ rising in Genesis 7:17-20.

Genesis 8:2-5	Genesis 7:11-12, 17-20
² And they were closed, the fountains of the deep and the windows of the skies, and it was restrained, the rain from the skies.	¹¹ And they split open, the fountains of the great deep burst open, and the windows of the skies were opened. ¹² And there was rain upon the land
³ And the waters turned back from upon the land, going back and the waters decreased	¹⁷ And the flood was forty days upon the land, and the waters were great
<i>The Flood Waters Recede From the Land.</i> Created by Tim Mackie for BibleProject Classroom: Noah to Abraham (2020).	

Genesis 8:2-5	Genesis 7:11-12, 17-20
at the end of one hundred and fifty days,	and they lifted up the ark, and it rose up over the land.
⁴ and the ark rested, in the seventh month, on the seventeenth day of the month, upon the mountains of Ararat.	¹⁸ And the waters were mighty, and they were very great upon the land, and the ark went on the face of the waters.
⁵ And the waters were going and decreasing until the tenth month; in the tenth month, on the first day of the month, the heads of the mountains became visible.	¹⁹ And the waters were mighty, very very much, upon the land, and they covered all the high mountains which are under the skies, ²⁰ fifteen cubits above, the waters were mighty, and they covered the mountains.
<i>The Flood Waters Recede From the Land.</i> Created by Tim Mackie for BibleProject Classroom: Noah to Abraham (2020).	

- The waters above and below were released, later they are closed.
- The ark was lifted and rose up high. Then the ark rests and touches down.
- The waters were great and increased over the land. The waters recede and turn back.
- The waters covered the mountains. The heads of the mountains are revealed.

Mount Ararat

Notice that the narrator doesn't say which particular mountain the ark rested upon. The narrator simply says that it came to rest in "the mountains of Ararat."

The word "Ararat" (Heb. אֲרָרָט) is derived from Akkadian *Urartu*, and it refers to the region that today is on the far eastern border of Turkey, near Armenia. It's a highland hill country north of Mesopotamia in between Lake Van and the Caspian Sea. There are a number of high peaks that tower above the horizon.



Serouj Ourishian (2016). [Wikipedia](#)

Interestingly, in other Mesopotamian flood stories like the Epic of Gilgamesh, Utnapishtim's ark rests on "Mount Nimush" in the Zagros mountains on the eastern border of today's Iran and Iraq (some 400 miles from Mount Ararat). However, in Berossus' account, he names the region similar to the biblical account, in the mountains of Armenia. For more information, see John Day's "The Flood and the Ten Antediluvian Figures in Berossus and in the Priestly Source in Genesis" (Day, 2011. 65-67.).

Notice that the name Ararat forms an elaborate wordplay on Noah's birth story in Genesis 5:29. The Ararat wordplay relates to what Noah will do on this mountain when he gets out of the boat.

Noah's Naming

Genesis 5:28-29 NASB*

²⁸ And Lemek lived one hundred and eighty-two years, and he caused the birth of a son.

²⁹ And he called his name "Noah (נח)," saying,

"This one will give us **comfort (נחם)** from our work and from the toil of our hands from **the ground (האדמה)**) which the LORD has **cursed (אררה)**."

*Key Words Adapted by Teacher

Post-Flood Connections

Genesis 8:4 NASB*

and the ark **rested (נוח)** in the mountain of **Ararat (אררט)**

*Key Words Adapted by Teacher

Genesis 8:18-21 Instuctor's Translation

¹⁸ Noah went out from the ark ... ²⁰ And he built an altar to Yahweh and he caused an offering to go up on the altar, ²¹ and Yahweh smelled the **restful smell (ניחוח)** and Yahweh said to his heart, "I will never again curse (קלל) **the ground (האדמה)** on account of humanity."

Noah's name, rest (*noakh*), alludes to his destiny, which is to bring comfort (*nakhham*) to the ground that God has cursed (*'erarah*). So Noah's ark rests (נֹחַ) in the mountains of "carse" (*'ararat*) and offers a sacrificial smell (*nikhoakh*), and God says he won't curse the ground anymore.

In the Seventh Month, on the 17th Day

Noah's time on the ark has been coordinated with Israel's liturgical calendar that appears much later in the Torah (Lev. 23). The seventh month is the Fall new year celebration, and the 17th day is right in the middle of the festival of *Sukkot*/Tabernacles.

Given the importance of the ark as a proto-temple, this cannot be without significance: The ark, as a proto-tabernacle, goes through the chaos waters and comes to rest on a cosmic mountain at the same time of the year when the Israelites will later live in their micro-tabernacles during the feast of *Sukkot* to recall their journey through the desert on their way to the promised land.

Recall how in Genesis 1:2 the chaos waters and the desert are the two primary images of a non-ordered realm.

Noah, the Birds, and the Drying Land: Translation and Literary Design of Genesis 8:6-14

- a 6 And it came about at the end of forty days,
b and Noah opened the window of the ark which he had made;
7 and he sent out a raven,
and it flew here and there until the waters were dried up from upon the land.

- A
a 8 And he sent out a dove from him,
b to see if the waters were abated from the face of the ground;
c 9 and the dove found no place of rest (מנוח) for the sole of its foot,
c' and it returned to him into the ark,
b' because the waters were on the surface of all the land.
a' And he sent out his hand and took it,
a' and he brought it into the ark to himself.

- B
10 And he waited yet another seven days;
and again he sent out the dove from the ark.
11 And the dove came to him at the time of evening,
and behold, in its mouth was an olive leaf, freshly picked,
and Noah knew that the waters were abated from upon the land.

12 **And he waited yet another seven days,**
A' **and he sent out the dove ;**
and **it did not again return to him .**

a 13 **And it came about in the six hundred and first year,**
b **in the first month,**
b' **on the first of the month,**
c **the waters** were **dried up** from upon **the land ;**
d **and Noah removed the covering of the ark ,**
c' and he looked, and behold, the face of **the land** was **dried up**.
b' 14 **And in the second month,**
b' **on the twenty-seventh day of the month,**
c' **the land** was **dry**.

Genesis 8:6-14. Translation and Literary Design by Tim Mackie for BibleProject Classroom: Noah to Abraham (2020).

Spying Birds in Mesopotamian Flood Accounts

The sending out of the raven and the dove is one of the most well-known parallels between the flood stories in the Epic of Gilgamesh, the account of Berossus, and the biblical account.

When the seventh day arrived,
I released **a dove** to go free,
The dove went and returned,
No landing place came to view, **it turned back**.
I released **a swallow** to go free,
The swallow went and returned,
No landing place came to view, **it turned back**.
I sent **a raven** to go free,
The raven went forth, saw the ebbing of the waters,
It ate, circled, left droppings, **did not turn back**.

Gilgamesh Epic, Tablet 11

After the waters of the Great Flood had come and quickly left, Xisuthrus **freed several birds**. They **found neither food nor a place to rest, and they returned** to the ship. After a few days, he again **set free some other birds**, and **they too came back** to the they ship, but **they returned with claws covered with mud**. Then later for **a third time he set free some other birds**, but **they did not return** to the ship.

Berossus' Babylonica, paragraph 54

It's clear that the sending out of the birds was a standard motif in the tradition used by the biblical author, who adapted this scene to his own purposes by the introduction of strategic vocabulary.

Recalling the Days of Genesis 1

The sequence of Genesis 8:1-9:6 replays the key vocabulary of the days of creation in Genesis 1.

- The repetition of “seven days” two times activates the pattern of seven days in Genesis 1.
- The dove’s return “at the time of the evening” recalls day four, when the sun and moon are appointed as rulers who divide the day from the night.
- The variety of birds recalls day five: the birds who fly above the waters.

The 3 + 1 Test of Noah

Noah first sends out a raven, an omnivorous bird and therefore ritually impure (see Lev. 11:15). It does not return to the ark, presumably because it can find food out among the waters.

Noah then sends out a dove, a vegetarian and ritually pure bird (see Lev. 1:14; 5:7), and it cannot find food until the dry land appears.

The threefold sending out of the bird is a kind of test that Noah uses to make sure the divine promise is really taking place. This makes sense of why the narrator slows down the story, unnecessarily as far as the plot is concerned, to retell the dove scene in language reminiscent of the garden of Eden test.

Genesis 8:8-11 Instructor's Translation

⁸ And he sent out a dove from him,
to see if the waters were abated (קלל) from the face of the ground.

⁹ And the dove found no place of rest for the sole of its foot,
and it returned to him into the ark,
because the waters were on the surface of all the land.

And he sent out his hand and took it (שלח + יד + לקח)

and he brought her to himself (בוא + אליו) into the ark

¹⁰ and he waited yet another seven days;
and again he sent out the dove from the ark.

¹¹ And the dove came to him at the time of evening,
and behold, in its mouth was an olive **leaf (עלה)**, freshly picked,
and Noah knew (ידע) that the waters were abated (קלל) from upon the land,

Literary Connections to the Eden Test

- קלל is a homonym for “curse,” parallel to ארר in Genesis 3:14, 17
- “**So that he doesn’t send out his hand and take (שלח + יד + לקח)** also from the tree of life” (Gen. 3:22)
- “**And he brought her to the human (בוא + אליו)**” (Gen. 2:22)
- “**And they knew (ידע)** that they were naked and they sewed a fig tree **leaf (עלה)** and made garments for themselves” (Gen. 3:7)

In Genesis 3, God is testing the humans’ faithfulness to him, while in Genesis 8, Noah is testing God’s faithfulness to him.

- God “brought the woman to the human,” and she becomes the means through which the humans fail the test of following God’s command. In the same way, the bird is Noah’s means of testing God’s promise to deliver him, so he “brings her to himself.”
- Adam and Eve “send out their hand and take” from the wrong tree, which is the object of their test. In the same way, Noah sends out his hand to take the dove, which is his way of testing God’s promise.
- The humans take the **knowing** of good and bad, **know** they are naked, and so they use a **leaf** to cover over their failure. In the same way, Noah sends out a dove as a test and the **leaf** becomes the way he **knows** that God has kept his promise.

Flood Recession = New Creation

The date of the recession of the floodwaters has been coordinated with the Torah’s chronology of creation, Passover, and the inauguration of the tabernacle.

Genesis 8:13 NASB*

Now it came about in the **six hundred and first year**, **in the beginning (בראשון)**, **on the first of the month**, the water was dried up from the earth. Then Noah removed the covering of the ark, and looked, and behold, the surface of the ground was dried up.

*Key Words Adapted by Teacher

Genesis 1:1-2 Instructor's Translation

¹ **In the beginning (בראשית)** God created the skies and the land. ² Now the land was wild and waste and darkness was over the deep waters, but the Spirit of God was hovering over the waters ...

Exodus 12:1-2 NASB

¹ Now the LORD said to Moses and Aaron in the land of Egypt, ² “This month shall be **the beginning (ראשון)** of months for you; it is to be **the first month of the year** to you.

Exodus 40:1-2 NASB*

¹ Then the LORD spoke to Moses, saying, ² “On the **first day** of **the beginning (ראשון)** **month** you shall set up the tabernacle of the tent of meeting.

*Key Words Adapted by Teacher

“According to the ... chronology the new world emerged from the flood waters on the first day of the liturgical year, the same day on which the tabernacle was set up and dedicated in the wilderness (Gen. 8:13; Exod. 40:2). It will be recalled that the first temple was also dedicated during Sukkoth, the autumnal New Year Festival (1 Kgs. 8:2, 65). We are also told that it took seven years to build which ... is related to the seven days of creation. The same dating system requires that the week of creation in Gen 1:1-2:4 be the first week of the liturgical year or, in other words, the primordial New Year Festival.”

Blenkinsopp, Joseph (1976). "The Structure of P". *Catholic Biblical Association* Vol. 38, (No. 3). 283-284.

Divine Speech Summons Noah to Leave the Ark: Translation and Literary Design of Genesis 8:15-19

A 15 And Elohim spoke to Noah, saying,

16 “ **Go out** from the ark,

B **you and your wife**
and your sons and your sons’ wives with you.

17 **From every living thing with you**

B' **from all flesh,**
birds and animals
and every creeper that creeps on the land,

A' **make them go out** with you,

so they can swarm in the land
and be fruitful and multiply in the land .”

A 18 And Noah **went out** ,

B **and his sons and his wife**
and his sons’ wives with him.

19 **Every living thing,**

B' **every creeper,**
and every bird,
everything that creeps on the land,

A' by their families **they went out** from the ark.

Genesis 8:15-19. Translation and Literary Design by Tim Mackie for BibleProject Classroom: Noah to Abraham (2020).

The command and fulfillment structure of this scene creates an orderly and processional feel to the exit from the ark. This description of the exit from the ark precisely matches the narrative of their entrance into the ark in 6:17-22.

Entering the Ark		Exiting the Ark	
Command	6:18-20 ¹⁸ And you will go into the ark you and your sons and your wife, and your sons' wives with you. ¹⁹ And of every living thing of all flesh, two of everything you will make go into the ark, to keep them alive with you; they shall be male and female. ²⁰ Of the birds after their kind, and of the animals after their kind, of every creeping thing of the ground after its kind, two of every kind will go to you to keep them alive.	8:15-17 ¹⁵ And Elohim spoke to Noah, saying, ¹⁶ "Go out from the ark, you and your wife and your sons and your sons' wives with you. ¹⁷ From every living thing with you from all flesh, birds and animals and every creeper on the land, make them go out with you ...	
Fulfillment	7:13-16 ¹³ On that very day Noah went and Shem and Ham and Japheth, the sons of Noah, and Noah's wife and the three wives of his sons with them, into the ark, ¹⁴ they, and every living creature after its kind, and all the beasts after their kinds, and every creeper that creeps on the land after its kind, and every bird after its kind, every bird of every wing. ¹⁵ And they went to Noah, into the ark, two by two, from all flesh in which was the breath of life, ¹⁶ and those going, male and female of all flesh ...	8:18-19 ¹⁸ And Noah went out, and his sons and his wife and his sons' wives with him. ¹⁹ Every living thing, every creeper, and every bird, everything that creeps on the land, by their families they went out from the ark.	
<i>Entering the Ark and Exiting the Ark. Created by Tim Mackie for BibleProject Classroom: Noah to Abraham (2020).</i>			

This elaborate emphasis on the entrance into and exit from the temple-ark gives the narrative a liturgical feel, as if we are watching a procession into and out of the temple that passes through the "gate" to experience divine presence and deliverance.

Families of the Animals

As Noah and his family get off the ark, they exit parallel to all the animals “by their families” (Heb. *mispakhah* / משפחה). This word appears 303 times in the Hebrew Bible, and this first appearance of the term is also the only time it is used of non-humans. In the parallel panel of 7:13-16, the animals are grouped together by species using the word “kind” (מין), a word used in Genesis 1:21, 24-25.

In deliberate contrast to “kind,” the narrator in Genesis 8:18-29 calls the animal species “families” as they exit along with Noah and his sons, who will become the three main families of the biblical world in Genesis 10. In fact, the word family will be used next of just these three sons (Gen. 10:5, 20, 31).

This creates an “animal families / human families” parallel, which is drawn upon in the prophets in a big way, like in the two framing visions of Isaiah 2 and 11.

Reflection Question

If the arrival of the flood was a cosmic collapse, then God’s salvation of humanity, the animals, and the land through the waters is an act of new creation. How do the biblical authors connect the post-flood restoration to creation?

Session 18: Noah's Sacrifice and God's Blessing

Key Takeaways

- The reason for the flood—the condition of the human heart—becomes God's reason to never again flood the Earth.
- Even though the land is cursed, God chooses to never again treat the land as though it is cursed.
- Noah is one example in the larger pattern that leads to the ultimate anointed one who will suffer on behalf of the wicked—a righteous one who will die for the wicked—and make atonement to open the way back to Eden.

Noah's Sacrifice and God's Response: Translation and Literary Design of Genesis 8:20-22

- a 20 And Noah built **an altar** to Yahweh,
b **and he took from every pure animal**
b' **and from every pure bird**
a' and he caused to go up a going-up offering on **the altar**.

21 And Yahweh smelled the soothing smell;

The Curse Is Rescinded and No Death

- a and Yahweh said to **his heart**,
b “**I will never again curse the ground** on account of humanity,
a because the purpose of the **heart of humanity** is bad from his youth;
b' **and I will never again strike all life**, as I just did.

Cosmic Order Is Restored

22 For all the days of the land,
seedtime and harvest,
and cold and heat,
and summer and winter,
and day and night
will not stop.”

The Blessing Is Released and Life Is to Bear Fruit and Multiply

And Elohim **blessed** Noah and his sons

and he said to them,
"Be fruitful and multiply and fill the land."

Genesis 8:20-22. Translation and Literary Design by Tim Mackie for BibleProject Classroom Adam to Noah (2020).

The Hero's Sacrifice in Mesopotamian Flood Accounts

The sacrifice of the flood hero motif is preserved in all of the existing Mesopotamian flood narratives.

I set up an offering stand on the top of the mountain.
Seven and seven cult vessels I set out,
I heaped reeds, cedar, and myrtle in their bowls.
The gods smelled the savor,
The gods smelled the sweet savor,
The gods crowded around the sacrificer like flies.

Gilgamesh Epic, Tablet 11

He put down [...],
Provided food [...]
[...]
The gods smelt the fragrance,
Gathered like flies over the offering.

Atrahasis Epic, Tablet 3

(140') Ziusudra, being the king,
stepped up before Utu kissing the ground (before him).
The king was butchering oxen, was being lavish with the sheep [barley cak]es, crescents together with [...]
[...] he was crumbling for him
[...]
[juniper, the pure plant of the
mountains] he filled [on the fire]

Eridu Genesis

He disembarked, accompanied by his wife and his daughter together with the steersman. He prostrated himself in worship to the earth and set up an altar and sacrificed to the gods.

Berosus' Babylonica

However, the function and result of the offering in the Mesopotamian accounts is different. This theme receives the most treatment in the Gilgamesh Epic.

The gods crowded around the sacrificer like flies.
 As soon as Belet-ili arrived,
 She held up the great fly-ornaments that Anu had made her in his infatuation, "O these gods here, as surely
 as I shall not forget this lapis on my neck,
 I shall be mindful of these days, and not forget, forever!
 Let the gods come to the offering,
 But Enlil must not come to the offering,
 For he, unreasoning, brought on the deluge,
 And reckoned my people for destruction!"
 Suddenly, as Enlil arrived,
 He saw the boat, Enlil became angry,
 He was filled with fury at the gods.
 "Who came out alive? No man was to survive destruction!"
 Ninurta made ready to speak, and said to the warrior Enlil,
 "Who but Ea could devise such a thing?
 For Ea alone knows every craft."
 Ea made ready to speak, and said to the warrior Enlil,
 "You, O warrior, are the sage of the gods,
 How could you, unreasoning, have brought on the deluge?
 Impose punishment on the sinner for his sin,
 On the transgressor for his transgression ..."

Gilgamesh Epic, Tablet 11

- The goddess Belet-ili holds up her fancy fly jewel necklace as a reminder to the gods that the flood should never happen again. In her speech, she wants the gods to learn a lesson from the flood. The indiscriminate slaughter of humanity is not in their own best interests because they almost starved without sacrifices.
- The final line shows the gods' new policy: Each sinner will face the consequences of their own actions.
- How different from the theology of the flood story.

Noah's Sacrifice and the Theology of the Flood Narrative

Like Abel, who was the first human to offer animal sacrifices at the door of Eden (see [Gen. 4:7](#)), Noah offers animal sacrifices at the door of the ark, which was a floating micro-Eden.

Noah's sacrifice does not placate a volatile and angry deity. Rather, his obedience and faithfulness to God's instructions qualify him to be a new *'adam*, a royal priest who offers up a valuable sacrifice on behalf of the new humanity.

Noah's priestly role was hinted at in Genesis 7:1-3 when he was directed by God to select ritually pure and impure animals to take onto the ark. Their purpose was not made clear, but now we find that these pure animals were qualified for a sacrifice of thanks.

Noah's sacrifice is a "going-up offering" (*'olah* / עֹלָה), which is traditionally translated as a "whole burnt offering" (see the description in [Lev. 1](#)). It was the most costly offering because the worshiper did not receive

back any parts of the animal for a feast.

The going-up offering is the total surrender of a precious substitute who ascends before God's heavenly temple as a righteous and blameless representative to appeal to God on behalf of the offerer. In Noah's case, he is already a righteous and blameless person, but his offering is not just for him but for all creation and all humanity yet to be born.

The result of Noah's sacrifice is made more clear by recognizing the hyperlinks back to the opening of the flood story. In Genesis 6:5-6, God states his reasons for bringing the flood.

Bookends of the Flood Narrative

Genesis 6:5-6 Instructor's Translation

⁵ And Yahweh saw (וריא יהוה) that great was the evil of the human in the land and **all the purpose of the plans in his heart was only evil all the day** (כל יצר מחשבות לבו רק רע). ⁶ And Yahweh regretted (נחם) that he made the human in the land, and he was grieved in **his heart** (אל לבו).

Genesis 8:21 Instructor's Translation

And Yahweh smelled (וירח יהוה) the pleasing smell, and Yahweh said to **his heart** (אל לבו), "I will not continue to treat as cursed any more the land (האדמה), on account of the human (האדם), **for the purpose of the heart of the human is evil from his youth** (יצר לב נאדם רע מנערו) and I will not continue any more/again to strike all life as I have done."

Genesis 8:21 is a hinge-hyperlink text that is reaching back to strategic points in Genesis 1-8 and drawing the themes together into a coherent whole. Because of Noah's obedience and atoning sacrifice, God is no longer going to treat the land as cursed because of humanity's rebellious evil; rather, he is going to treat it as blessed despite the grim reality of human evil.

Genesis 8:21 Instructor's Translation

and Yahweh said to **his heart** (אל לבו), "I will **not continue to treat as cursed** (לקלל) **the land, on account (** (בעבור) **of the human**, for the purpose of the heart of the human is bad from his youth and I will **not again strike all life as I have done**.

Genesis 3:17 Instructor's Translation

Cursed (ארורה) **is the ground on account of you** (בעבורך), **in grief** (בעצבון) you will eat from it all the days of your life.

Genesis 5:29 Instructor's Translation

And he called his name Noah (נוח), saying "This one will give us comfort (נחם) from our work and from **the grief** (עצבון) of our hands from **the land which Yahweh has cursed**" (אררה)

Genesis 6:5-7a Instructor's Translation

⁵ And Yahweh saw ... that all the purpose of humanity's heart (לבו) was only evil all the day ... ⁶ And Yahweh **was grieved** (ויתעצב) **in his heart** (אל לבו) ... ⁷ and said **"I will wipe** (מחה) **away humanity ... for I regret** (נחם) **that I have made them ... for the land was filled with violence** (חמס). "

Is There No More Curse on the Ground?

Notice how God's words in Genesis 8:21b and 8:21d are set in poetic parallelism:

- Verse 21b: I will not continue / **to curse again** **the land** , / on account of the human
- Verse 21d: I will not continue / **again to strike** **all life** / as I have done

The words **curse/strike** are set in poetic parallelism, along with **the land/all life** . This means that "treating as cursed" has a specific meaning in this context because it is synonymous with the "striking of all life" that took place in the flood.

There are multiple Hebrew words for "curse." Two of them appear in Genesis 1-11, and there is an important difference between them.

1. "To curse" = Hebrew *'arar* (ארר) means to declare someone's misfortune/to effect their misfortune.

Genesis 3:14 NASB

The LORD God said to the serpent, "Because you have done this, **cursed** are you more than all cattle, and more than every beast of the field; on your belly you will go, and dust you will eat all the days of your life ..."

Genesis 3:17-18 NASB*

¹⁷ Then to the human he said ... "**Cursed** is the ground because of you; in toil you will eat of it all the days of your life. ¹⁸ Both thorns and thistles it shall grow for you; and you will eat the plants of the field ..."

*Key Words Adapted by Teacher

Deuteronomy 28:20 NASB

The LORD will send upon you **curse**s, confusion, and rebuke, in all you undertake to do, until you are destroyed and until you perish quickly, on account of the evil of your deeds, because you have forsaken me.

2. "To treat as cursed" = Hebrew *qalel* (קלל) means to treat someone with contempt, to treat them as one who has been cursed.

Genesis 16:5 NASB*

And Sarai said to Abram, "May the wrong done me be upon you. I gave my maid into your arms, but when she saw that she had conceived, I was **treated as cursed/despised** (קלל) in her sight. May the LORD judge between you and me."

*Key Words Adapted by Teacher

Leviticus 19:14 NASB*

You shall not **treat as cursed/despise** (קלל) one who is deaf, nor place a stumbling block before the blind, but you shall revere your God; I am the LORD.

*Key Words Adapted by Teacher

2 Samuel 16:13 NASB*

So David and his men continued along the road while Shimei was going along the hillside opposite him, **treating him as cursed** (קלל) as he went and throwing stones at him and showering him with dirt.

*Key Words Adapted by Teacher

There are a few places where both words are used together, so the slight difference between them becomes more clear: *qalel* means to treat someone like they are *'arar*, which means to speak about or to act toward them as if they are actually in a cursed state.

Genesis 12:2-3 NASB*

² And I will make you a great nation,
and I will bless you,
and make your name great;
and so you shall be a blessing;
³ and I will bless those who bless you,
and the one who **treats you as cursed** (קלל) I will **curse** (ארר).
And in you all the families of the earth will be blessed.

*Key Words Adapted by Teacher

Exodus 22:28 NASB*

Do not **treat God as cursed/with contempt** (קלל) or **curse** (ארר) the ruler of your people.

*Key Words Adapted by Teacher

This gives us a helpful profile of the word *qalel*. It can refer to actions or words that treat someone as if they were in a state of misfortune, disaster, and death. This gives more significance to God's words in [Genesis 8:21](#).

Noah's Sacrifice and the Release of Divine Blessing

The literary design of Genesis 8:21-9:1 keys into important themes in the Genesis story.

The Outer Frames (Gen. 8:21, 9:1)

The outer frames of God's speech match each other in blessing/curse vocabulary. The curse of the flood, a divine judgment, is rescinded and the universal blessing is released. In this way, Noah is portrayed as an image of the "seed of the woman" in [Genesis 3:15](#) who undoes what the snake has done and so restores the Eden blessing to all humanity.

The Inner Frames (Gen. 8:22)

The inner frame is a poetic statement about the order of creation established in [Genesis 1:3-31](#). The flood was the undoing of cosmic order as the boundary between Heaven and Earth collapsed in on itself. Here God makes a promise (marked by a covenant sign in 9:8-17) that creation order will endure, specifically the annual, seasonal, and daily rhythms that make human flourishing possible.

The Conclusion (Gen. 9:1)

God announces that even though the land is under a curse ('*arar*'), that is, in a state of misfortune because of human folly and violence ([Gen. 3:17; 5:29](#)), God is not going to treat the land and its people as under the curse. In Genesis 3-6, humanity has polluted God's good world with innocent blood, resulting in the cosmic collapse of the flood. But instead of letting the land remain under that curse, God is going to give the gift of cosmic stability instead. He will maintain cosmic order so that the seed of the woman can arrive and undo the power of the curse.

"Salvation through the ark does not fulfill the meaning and destiny of Noah's name (from Gen. 5:29). Rather, Noah is saved in order to worship, to offer the sacrifice that causes God another 'repenting' (נחם, from 6:8), that is, a 'rest/comforting' (ניחוח) that turns curse into blessing. Noah's priestly mediation is the means by which relief from the toil of the curse ground became a reality. For God as well as for humanity, Noah is the consolation for the fall of Adam."

Morales, Michael (2012). [The Tabernacle Pre-Figured: Cosmic Mountain Ideology in Genesis and Exodus](#). Peeters Publishers. 186.

When Noah gets off the boat, his sacrifice marks him as the righteous and blameless intercessor who will devote himself to God. God accepts his sacrifice, but he notes that humanity is no different now than before the flood. This is ironic because Noah and his family are the only people around!

God's view of the human condition is vindicated by the following narrative when Noah goes on to replay the sin of Adam and Eve by eating the fruit of a garden, getting naked, and involving himself in a shameful act with his son. This disqualifies Noah from being the fully-fledged seed of the woman of Genesis 3:15, but he does advance the portrait of the needed deliverer.

"The text clearly indicates that God's heart changed towards mankind, though mankind's heart itself had not changed. Indeed, given that God's heart has changed while the primary reason for the deluge (man's heart) has not, the deity, apart from an atoning sacrifice, would be open to the charge of capriciousness. The reader would wonder: 'Was the flood in vain?' That is, did the deluge accomplish anything if the original circumstance and conflict remains? Failing to connect God's change of heart to the sacrifice, one is left with the impression that God somehow matured through the experience of the flood ... All of these charges are avoided when the change of heart is understood as wrought by Noah's pleasing sacrifice ... Until God's heart is changed by the sacrifice—even after the deluge, there is no divine resolve toward forbearance and blessing. The pivotal and efficacious sacrifice of Noah ... changes mankind's position from cursed to blessed."

Adapted from Morales, Michael (2012). [The Tabernacle Pre-Figured: Cosmic Mountain Ideology in Genesis and Exodus](#). Peeters Publishers. 183-185.

Reflection Question

The reason God brought the flood—the evil purposes of the human heart—is now the reason God will never again strike all life with a flood (Gen. 8:21). What significant act is different after the flood?

Session 19: The Pattern of the High Place Sacrifice

Key Takeaways

- Noah's sacrifice—on the high place in front of the door of the divine refuge—is part of a larger literary pattern developing the theme of sacrifice in Genesis and beyond.
- God's response to Noah's sacrifice eliminates simplistic notions of God's wrath or God's mercy. It's both, not one or the other, and this drives the drama of the biblical story forward.

Noah's Sacrifice and the Design Pattern of Costly Commitment

Noah's sacrifice and the turn of God's will from judgment to generous blessing is a paradigmatic event in the Hebrew Bible. It sets the template for the unfolding drama as God continues to work with the seed of the woman, which will replay Adam and Eve's sin, generating conflict that leads to violence and a flood of divine judgment, creating an ultimate crisis of decision. Will humanity surrender what is most precious in order to release divine blessing into the world?

"As disobedience is decisive in the loss of life in Genesis 3, so obedience to the command is decisive in Genesis 12:1-3 and in the flood story. Noah's righteousness in 6:8-9 is a future reality that becomes actual only as Noah realizes it by his obedience 'before Yahweh' (7:1). When was this righteousness effected? [A]t the end of the flood when Noah's survival is first assured. Noah becomes by virtue of the acceptance of his sacrifice a *tsaddiq* in relationship to Yahweh. Here also the reason for the righteousness of Noah becomes clear: ... not simply for the salvation of Noah's immediate family, but the salvation of all humanity and living things. As Abraham received in Genesis 12:1-3 a command followed by a promise which incorporates a further command to be a blessing for all peoples, so Noah received a command followed by a promise that implies he functions as a *tsaddiq* for the salvation of humanity."

Clark, W. Malcom (1971). ["The Righteousness of Noah"](#). *Vetus Testamentum*, 21 (3). 273-274.

"But it is not simply that an extraordinary act of obedience by a righteous man [Abraham] leads to extraordinary blessing. It is that one man's obedience climaxes in an act of sacrifice and thus leads to extraordinary blessing ... The faithful obedience of Noah culminating in his sacrifices after the flood changed God's disposition toward sinful humanity. Similarly Abraham's obedience guaranteed the future of his descendants and that through them blessing should come to all nations."

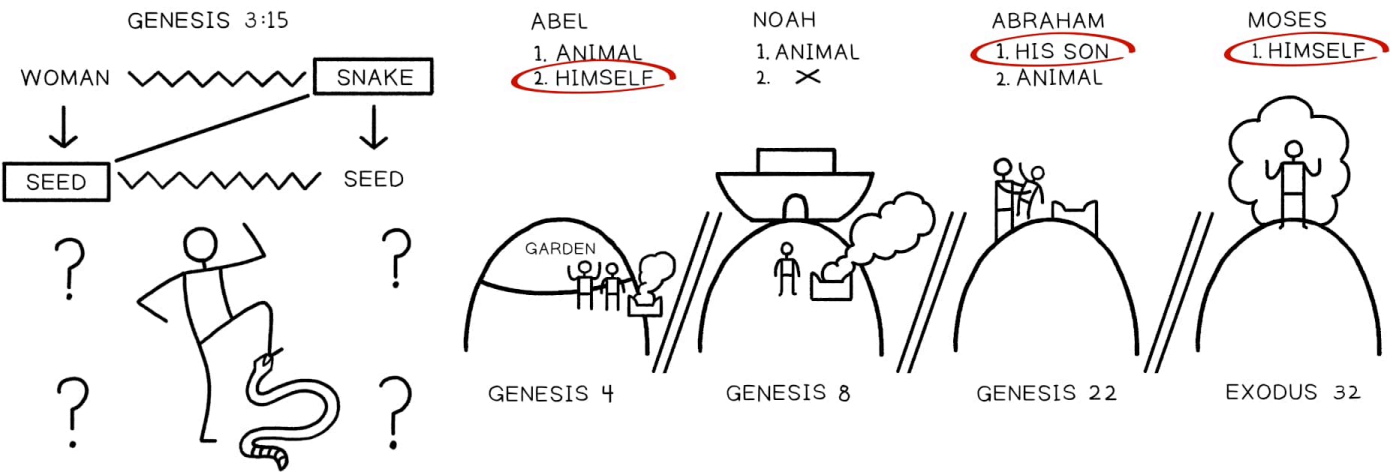
Wenham, Gordon (1997). "The Akedah: A Paradigm of Sacrifice." *Journal of Biblical Literature*, 116 (3). 102.

The Design Pattern of Costly Commitment Throughout Genesis and Exodus

The promise in Genesis 3:15—of a seed of the woman who will triumph over the snake but be struck in the process—sets the outline for a pattern of costly commitment that develops throughout the rest of Genesis and into Exodus.

- Abel on the mountain of Eden (Gen. 4:1-8)
- Noah on Mount Ararat (Gen. 8:20-22)
- Abraham and Isaac on Mount Morah (Gen. 22:1-14)
- Jacob loses Joseph (Gen. 37)
- Pharaoh loses his son in Egypt (Exod. 12:29-30)
- Moses at Mount Sinai (Exod. 32)

With each iteration of the pattern, we see small differences that begin to sketch the portrait of a chosen one who will come and give his own life on behalf of the many.



The Design Pattern of the High Place Sacrifice. Illustration created by Tim Mackie for BibleProject Classroom: Noah to Abraham (2020).

Reflection Question

How would you describe the way that this pattern of high place sacrifices ultimately leads to the anticipation of Jesus’ self-giving, atoning sacrifice?



Module 5: After the Flood

SESSIONS 20-22

Unpack the final scenes of the flood story, and consider how the flood story shows up in modern conversations.

Session 20: God's Covenant With Noah

Key Takeaways

- God prohibits consuming blood to remind people that all life ultimately belongs to God.
- A covenant is an external mechanism used to bind together a relationship that has been broken.

God Provides Food and Prohibits Bloodshed: Translation and Literary Design of Genesis 9:1-7

¹ And Elohim blessed Noah and his sons
and he said to them,
“ **Be fruitful and multiply, and fill the land** .

- a ² The **fear of you** and the terror of **you** will be
b **upon every living creature of the land**
and upon every bird of the skies;
with everything that creeps on the ground,
and with all the fish of the sea;
a' into **your hand they are given** ;
b ³ **every creeper that is living,**
for you it will be for eating ,
a' **I give all to you** , as I gave the green plant.
-
- a ⁴ Only the flesh with its **life** , **its blood** , you will **not eat** ;
⁵ indeed, **I will require** your **life-blood** ;
b **from every beast I will require** it,
b' and **from every human,**
from a man's brother,
b'' **I will require** the **life** of a human.
a' ⁶ He who **pours out** the **blood** of a **human** ,
by a **human** will his **blood** be **poured out** ,
because in the image of God he made humanity.

⁷ **And as for you all, be fruitful and multiply** ;

Genesis 9:1-7. Translation and Literary Design by Tim Mackie for BibleProject Classroom: Noah to Abraham (2020).

Structural Links Between 9:1-7, 6:21, and 1:29-30

Just as God instructed Noah to prepare food for himself and the animals as they boarded the ark (in 6:21), so now God instructs Noah on the provision of food outside the ark. But notice that God's words explicitly reference his command to all humanity in Genesis 1:29-30 and indicate a new program in light of humanity's violent nature that has been revealed in the flood narrative.

Genesis 9:2-3 Instructor's Translation

² Every living creature of the land and upon every bird of the skies; with everything that creeps on the ground, and with all the fish of the sea; into your hand they are given; ³ every creeper that's living, for you it will be for food (לכם יהיה לאכלה), I give all to you, as I gave the green plant (כירק עשב נתתי).

Animals are given as food for the humans, just as the green plants were.

Genesis 6:21 Instructor's Translation

And as for you, take for yourself some of all edible-food that you will eat, and gather it to yourself; and it shall be for food for you (לך לאכלה) and for them.

Genesis 1:29-30 Instructor's Translation

²⁹ Then God said, "Behold, I have given you every plant (נתתי לכם כל עשב) yielding seed that is on the surface of all the earth, and every tree which has fruit yielding seed; to you it shall be food (לכם יהיה לאכלה) ³⁰and to every beast of the earth and to every bird of the sky and to every creature that moved on the earth which has life-being in it, every green plant for food." And it was so.

Green plants are given as food for humans and for the animals.

9:1-6 develops the themes of 1:26-30 in light of what the flood story argues about human nature. When human nature was pre-violence, a plant-based diet was the ideal. But now that humans take life, God regulates this new situation with guidelines that express the same ethical principles later found in the laws of Mount Sinai.

Genesis 1:27-30; Leviticus 17; Genesis 4

Genesis 1:28a: And God blessed them and said, "Be fruitful and multiply and fill the land"

Genesis 9:1-6

¹ And God blessed Noah and his sons and said to them, "Be fruitful and multiply and fill the land."

Restrictions on the Blood of Animals. Created by Tim Mackie for BibleProject Classroom: Noah to Abraham (2020).

Genesis 1:27-30; Leviticus 17; Genesis 4	Genesis 9:1-6
Genesis 1:28b: "and subdue it and rule over the fish of the sea and over the birds of the skies and over every living creatures that creeps on the land."	2a "And the fear of you and the terror of you will be upon all the beast of the land and over all the birds of the skies, over all that creeps the ground and over all the fish of the sea."
Genesis 1:29-30: Then God said, "Behold, I have given you every plant (כל עשב) yielding seed that is on the surface of all the earth, and every tree which has fruit yielding seed; to you it shall be food (לכם יהיה לאכלה) and to every beast of the earth and to every bird of the sky and to every thing that moves on the earth which has life-being in it, every green plant for food"; and it was so.	2b-3 "Into your hands they are given (בידכם נתנו). Every creeping thing, which has life, to you it will be for food (לכם יהיה לאכלה), just as I gave to you the green plant (כירק עשב נתתי לכם)."
Lev 17:11-13: "For the life of flesh is in its blood , and I have given it to you (נתתי לכם) upon the altar to atone (לכפר על נפשתיכם) for your lives, for the blood that is in the life atones. Therefore I said ... ' No living being among you shall eat the blood. '" Genesis 3 "you shall not eat"	4 "Surely you shall not eat flesh with its life, its blood. "
Genesis 4:8: Cain murders " his brother " (אחיו) Genesis 4:23: Lemek murders " a man " (איש)	5 "Surely ... I will require your blood which is your life from every beast I will require it and from the hand of a man (איש), his brother (אחיו), I will require the life of human.
Genesis 1:27: God created human in his own image, in the image of God he created him ; male and female he created them.	6 Whoever sheds human blood, by human his blood shall be shed, for in the image of God he made human.
<i>Restrictions on the Blood of Animals.</i> Created by Tim Mackie for BibleProject Classroom: Noah to Abraham (2020).	

Humanity's rule over the animals in Eden was conducted in the context of peaceful relations with them (Gen. 2:18-20). Now in the post-flood reality, a violent and bloodthirsty humanity rules the animals. The animals will see such humans as a source of fear and threat, and so human rule over them will be an exercise of fear (Gen. 9:2a).

Links in Genesis 9:2-3

This threatening human rule over the animals is related to the fact that humans want to eat the animals, and so God grants this as a concession. This is presented here in comparison to and as a lessening of the vegan garden ideal of Genesis 1:29-30.

"In [Genesis 1] creation account, only a vegetarian diet is mentioned either for humans or animals (Gen. 1:29-30). In the paradise story the first human's relationship to the animals certainly expresses authority, but the question is of companionship, not of eating them (Gen. 2:19). After the flood, the situation has changed. Noah offers animals and birds in sacrifice (Gen. 8:20). In Genesis 9:2-7, God reaffirms the grant of sovereignty over animals and birds, but from now on they are to be under the 'fear and dread' of humankind. As God originally gave all plants to humans for food, now he gives them all that moves, subject only to the prohibition of eating blood ... The effect of this passage immediately preceding the formal promise of God's covenant with both humans and animals is that mutual relationships between creatures of the earth are now envisaged as they are, not as they were idealized in Genesis 1 and 2, or in any other vision of universal peace. The Bible contains, in fact, two models for thinking about humans and animals: one paradisaical, the other this-worldly and realistic. The first way uses the picture of peace with and between wild animals (Isaiah 11) as a metaphor for cosmic and social peace; the second way sees peace from them as a practical aspect of desired shalom."

Murray, Robert (2007). [*The Cosmic Covenant: Biblical Themes of Justice, Peace and the Integrity of Creation*](#)." Gorgias Press. 34.

Links in Genesis 9:4

However, as soon as this concession is granted, God qualifies it. Taking the life of another creature does not mean humans are God. While humans may borrow the flesh of an animal for sustenance, they do not own the animal or its life. Thus, the life blood is not to be eaten. The concession to eat animals is marked by this prohibition of eating blood, which links forward to another concession: animal sacrifice in [Leviticus 17:11-13](#).

"It might be thought that the eating of blood would be so naturally repulsive as not to require legal proscription, but the history of the subject discredits such a notion. The frequency with which the prohibition is repeated in the Torah legislation testifies to the attractiveness of the practice in ancient times. Its appeal lay in the premise, explicated in Leviticus 17:11, 14 and [Deuteronomy 12:23](#), that the blood constituted the life-essence. Consequently, popular thought had it that one could renew or reinforce one's vitality through its absorption of blood. For this reason, blood played an important role in the cults of the dead in the ancient world. In the Torah, however, precisely because blood is the symbol of life, it belongs to God alone, as does life itself."

Sarna, Nahum M. (2001). [*The JPS Torah Commentary: Genesis*](#)." Jewish Publication Society. 61.

Links in Genesis 9:5-6

This prohibition leads to a wider reflection on the nature of life: All life, animal and human, belongs to God, and so humans are responsible to God for how they treat life. Animal life and human life must be honored as sacred because God is their source.

God's Covenant With Noah and All Creation: Translation and Literary Design of Genesis 9:8-17

8 **And Elohim said to Noah** and to his sons **with him** , saying,

9 “And I myself, behold, **I set up my covenant** **with y'all**,
and with your seed after you;

10 and **with every living creature** that is **with you** ,
the birds, the beasts, and every **living creature** of the land **with you** ;
from everything that comes out of the ark,
even every **living creature** of the land.

11 And **I set up my covenant with y'all**;
and never again will **all flesh** **be cut off by the waters of the flood** ,
and never again will there be a flood to ruin the land .”

12 **And Elohim said** ,

“This is **the sign of the covenant** which I am giving
between me and between you
and between every living creature that is **with you** , for everlasting generations;

13 I give **my bow in the cloud** ,
and it will be for **a sign of a covenant**
between me and between the land;

14 and it will come about when **I cloud a cloud** over the land,
that **it will be seen** , **the bow in the cloud** ,

15 and **I will remember** **my covenant**,
which is **between me and between you**
and between every living creature of all flesh ;
and never again will the waters become a flood to ruin all flesh .

16 And **the bow is in the cloud** ,
then **I will see it** ,
to remember **the everlasting covenant**
between Elohim and between every living creature,
with all flesh that is on the land.”

17 **And Elohim said to Noah** ,

“This is **the sign of the covenant which I have set up**
between me and all flesh that is on the land.”

Genesis 9:8-17. Translation and Literary Design by Tim Mackie for BibleProject Classroom: Adam to Noah (2020).

This is the first formal covenant speech and ceremony in the Hebrew Bible. It sets the design pattern for all future covenants that God makes with Abraham (Gen. 15; Gen. 17), the Israelites (Exod. 19-24), Phineas (Num. 25), and David (2 Sam. 7). It also sets the terms for the prophetic hope of the new covenant (Ezek. 36; Jer. 31; Isa. 54-55).

Literary Design and Main Theme

Gordon Wenham points out in his book *Genesis 1-15* that God’s covenant speech is designed in three movements, and the first and last movements form an introductory and concluding frame around the substance of the speech in the center (Wenham, 1987).

The covenant between God and all creation, mankind, and the animals is confirmed by God putting the rainbow in the clouds and making three speeches in verses 9-11, 12-16, 17. These are arranged concentrically.

A 9:9–11	“And I will establish (הקמתי) my covenant with you and your seed ... and all living creatures”		
	B 9:12a	And God said, “This is sign (אות) of the covenant”	
		C 9:12b	my covenant “for eternal (עולם) generations”
			D 9:13–16 “my bow (קשתי) which I place in the cloud, it will be for a sign (אות) of the covenant between me and all the land”
		C’ 9:16	I will remember “eternal (עולם) covenant”
	B’ 9:17a	And God said to Noah, “This is the sign (אות) of my covenant”	
A’ 9:17b	“the covenant which I am establishing (הקמתי) between me and all flesh”		

Chiasm of Genesis 9:9-17. Created by Tim Mackie for BibleProject Classroom: Noah to Abraham (2020).

“The first speech, vv 9-11, introduces the topic of the covenant and its content, the future stability of the cosmos. The second and most important speech, vv 12-16, equates the confirmation of the covenant with setting the rainbow in the clouds. The sign of the covenant is its confirmation. The third and final speech, v 17, sums up the significance of the whole event.”

Wenham, Gordon J. (1987). [Word Biblical Commentary, Vol. 1: Genesis 1-15](#). Thomas Nelson. 172-173.

Notice that the word “covenant” appears seven times.

The Cosmic Covenant

This is the first covenant speech and ceremony in the Hebrew Bible, and it appears after Noah’s sacrifice. Noah’s sacrifice is the narrative embodiment of his obedience that releases God’s blessing into a new creation and qualifies him to intercede on behalf of creation. It is fitting, therefore, that God makes a covenant with all creation (“cosmic covenant”) through a covenant with Noah.

Covenant (Heb. *berit* / ברית)

“A solemn commitment of oneself to undertake an obligation.”

Waltke, Bruce K. (2001). [Genesis: A Commentary](#). Zondervan Academic. 287.

“A covenant is an enduring agreement which defines a relationship between two parties involving a solemn, binding obligation on one or both parties, made by oath under threat of divine curse, and ratified by a visual ritual.”

Adapted from Lane, C. Daniel (2000). “*The Meaning and Use of the Old Testament Term for ‘Covenant’ (berît): with Some Implications for Dispensationalism and Covenant Theology*.” PhD diss., Trinity International University. 314.

A covenant is the formalization of a partnership between two parties so that they can accomplish or work toward a common end to each other’s benefit. The word “covenant” occurs 284 times in biblical Hebrew, clustered around certain covenant-making narratives or in texts that reference those narratives.

Covenants Between People in the Hebrew Bible

Covenant Type	Examples
International treaties	• King Solomon and King Hiram make a peace treaty and promise to share economic abundance for each other’s benefit (1 Kgs. 5:12). • Joshua and the Gibeonites make a peace treaty that exempts the Gibeonites from attack during the Israelite conquest of the land (Josh. 9:6-7, 11, 15-16).
Covenants Between People in the Bible. Created by Tim Mackie for BibleProject Classroom: Noah to Abraham (2020).	

Covenant Type	Examples
Clan/tribal alliances	• The neighboring clans of Abraham and Mamre promise to protect each other (Gen. 14:13). • Abraham and Abimelek promise to interact with integrity after Abraham's deception regarding Sarah (Gen. 21:27, 32). • Isaac and Abimelek promise to benefit one another and do no harm (Gen. 26:28).
Personal agreements	• Jacob and Laban (Gen. 31:44) promise not to cross the Israel/Aram border to do harm.
Loyalty agreements	• Jonathan promises to protect David from his father Saul and swears loyalty to David (1 Sam. 18:3, 20:8, 23:18). • The northern tribes of Israel promise to acknowledge the Judean David as their tribal king (2 Sam. 5:3).
Marriage	• Marriage is a loyalty agreement between a man and woman (see Prov. 2:17 and Mal. 2:14).
<i>Covenants Between People in the Bible.</i> Created by Tim Mackie for BibleProject Classroom: Noah to Abraham (2020).	

Covenants Between God and People in the Hebrew Bible

Covenant	Reference
Creation covenant	?
Covenant with Noah and all creation	Genesis 6:18, 9:8-17
Covenant with Abraham	Genesis 12, 15, 17, 22:15-18
Covenant with Israel	Exodus 19-24; Leviticus 26; Deuteronomy 28
Covenant with Levi	Numbers 25:6-13; Malachi 2:1-9
Covenant with David	2 Samuel 7; Psalm 89, 132
<i>Covenants Between God and People.</i> Created by Tim Mackie for BibleProject Classroom: Noah to Abraham (2020).	

Covenant	Reference
The New Covenant	Jeremiah 31; Ezekiel 36
<i>Covenants Between God and People</i> . Created by Tim Mackie for BibleProject Classroom: Noah to Abraham (2020).	

“With the Noahic covenant promising the stability of the cosmic structure, the Abrahamic covenant promising people and land, the Davidic covenant promising sovereignty, and the Israelite covenant promising life, security, and prosperity, the biblical authors and editors possessed a platform from which they could portray and reconcile nearly every historical tradition, legendary, didactic, and folk account in their tradition. If we deleted all references to covenant ... we would have simply an anthology of stories. As it is, we have a structure that can house a macro-plot.”

Friedman, Richard Elliot (1987). “The Hiding of the Face: An Essay on the Literary Unity of Biblical Narrative.” Neusner, J. (Ed.) [*Judaic Perspectives on Ancient Israel*](#). Fortress Press. 215.

In every one of these covenants, God forwards his purpose to provide a seed of the woman who will restore the Eden blessing to humanity and creation. Each covenant narrows down the lineage of promise as each generation passes and/or fails the test of faithfulness to God’s purposes.

A Covenant in Eden?

Given that all post-Eden covenants include allusions back to Genesis 1-2, many traditions believe that there was a covenant in place between God and Adam and Eve that was (a) unspoken and (b) broken in Genesis 3.

The absence of the word “covenant” in Genesis 1 or 2 is conspicuous. Why isn’t the relationship between God and Adam and Eve described as a covenant? A handful of reasons suggest themselves.

If Genesis 1-2 represents a divine-human ideal, then it seems important that while it’s not called a covenant, it is described with the basic elements of a covenant. Humans are God’s royal priestly representatives (the image of God), and they are invited to trust and follow God’s command (Gen. 2:15-17). If they do, there will be eternal life, and if not, death will result.

It is only after this primordial relationship between God and humans has been violated that God begins to initiate a succession of covenants.

“Covenants served to ... offer assurances, bolster faith, and reinforce commitments. In a world not invaded by sin, there would be no need for adding oaths to commitments, no need for ‘covenants’—no more than in such a world would oaths be necessary to establish the truth of one’s ‘yes’ or ‘no’ (see [Matt. 5:34-37](#); [Jas. 5:12](#); [Heb. 6:16](#)). Biblical covenants were emergency measures occasioned by and ministering to human weakness—until the kingdom of God has fully come.”

Stek, John (1994). “‘Covenant’ Overload in Reformed Theology.” *Calvin Theological Journal* Volume 29 (1). 40.

This is slightly overstated by Stek, but he makes an essential point. The word “covenant” is absent from the Eden story because, ideally, the divine-human relationship should not need to be formalized because it should be a natural union of wills and purposes. This type of union between the divine and human wills characterizes Jesus’ relationship to the Father (see [John 5:19](#), [6:38](#), [7:16](#), [7:28](#), [8:29](#)), and it is the kind of divine-human union that was forfeited in Eden.

In this reading, the covenant is a rescue mechanism, or a means to an end. It formalizes the divine purpose into commitments, and it invites human partners to fulfill the divine will. As Jeremiah says, the new covenant will not be like the old because it will bring about a new creation, one in which the human will is made one with the divine in love and commitment ([Jer. 31:31-34](#)). In such a world, formal commitments and oaths become unnecessary.

The institution of covenant points to an Eden and new creation ideal, and it should be seen as a means to an end. That end is the union of God and humanity in love, will, and purpose. The apostle Paul calls this “the new humanity” ([Eph. 4:24](#)).

Reflection Question

How do you understand the word “covenant”? What does a covenant accomplish?

Session 21: Reflecting on God's Covenant

Key Takeaways

- Unlike the gods of Israel's neighbors who made promises contingent upon the people upholding the terms of their covenant, God obligates himself alone to sustain the covenant he made with all the Earth after the flood.
- The sign of the bow evokes images of peace (the retired war bow), reconciliation (a bridge between Heaven and Earth), and hope (the triumph of light over the darkness of the chaotic storm).

The Image of the "Bow in the Clouds" (Gen. 9:13, 14, 16)

"And is there not to every law of nature a background pointing to the mysteries of the Divine nature and will? The label of the rainbow is sufficiently legible. Shining upon a dark ground ... it represents the victory of the light of love over the fiery darkness of wrath. Originating from the effect of the sun upon a dark cloud, it typifies the willingness of the heavenly to penetrate the earthly. Stretched between heaven and earth, it is as a bond of peace between both, and, spanning the horizon, it points to the all-embracing universality of the Divine mercy."

Keil, C. F., and Delitzsch, F. (2006). [*Commentary on the Old Testament: Pentateuch \(Vol. 1\)*](#). Hendrickson Publishers. 289-290.

Noah as an Archetypal Seed of the Woman

"While God is the main character of the narrative, Noah the righteous priest may yet be considered the literary 'hero' of the story, who both 'walks with' and 'brings rest' to God. Noah (נח), in fact, brings 'comfort' (נחם) both to humankind and to God. But further, not only because the narrative begins and ends with God's speech to Noah; and not only because the various wordplays on his name indicate Noah as a central character; but because the central question of the narrative concern salvation and worship: 'Who may ascend the mountain of Yahweh?' (Psalm 24:3) The flood narrative is really about Noah. This is to stress that the narrative is not really about the judgment of the world, but about how it was that Noah was saved from that judgment. ... The purpose of the story is not to show why God sent the flood, but to show why God saved Noah. The ark, not the flood, is the focus of the author's attention. ... As a priestly figure who is able to ascend the mountain of Yahweh, Noah stands as a new Adam, the primordial human who can dwell in the divine presence. As such he foreshadows the high priest in the tabernacle, who alone can enter the paradise of the holy of holies to purge the micro-cosmic tabernacle by making atonement."

Morales, Michael (2012). [*The Tabernacle Pre-Figured: Cosmic Mountain Ideology in Genesis and Exodus*](#). Peeters Publishers. 190-192.



This session has no other notes

Reflection Question

Have you ever considered the horizontal, half-circle shape of a rainbow? It almost looks like a bow for shooting arrows. What does God's bow in the clouds represent?

Session 22: Noah's Ark and the Flood Debate

Key Takeaways

- The biblical authors used cosmic hyperbole to emphasize the all-encompassing importance of the events described.
- Key vocabulary from the flood account is used at other points in the Bible to emphasize God's cosmic authority to hand creation over to its own self-destruction.

A Global Flood, a Local Flood, or Cosmic Collapse?

These two interpretive positions have received the most airtime in popular debate and culture. What they have in common is a desire to match the narrative details of the flood (especially Gen. 7:11-24) to a reconstructible historical flood that can be dated and located.

Both of these positions assume that the biblical author shares our modern cosmology and conception of the world as a "globe." Based on this assumption, the interpretive question becomes: Did the author have knowledge of the scope of the flood? This question results in multiple views.

- Global flood: The author knew (by divine inspiration) that the flood immersed the entire globe and depicted it as such.
- Local flood: The author didn't know about the scope and size of the globe and so depicted a localized flood as if it encompassed the entire globe.

Underneath this entire debate is an unexamined problem. The biblical authors did not share our modern cosmology, and the word "land" does not mean globe.

The language of 7:11-12 makes it clear that the author is working with an ancient world picture of a three-tiered cosmos.

Genesis 7:11-12 NASB*

¹¹ And in the six hundredth year of Noah's life, in the second month, on the seventeenth day of the month, on that day all **the fountains of the great deep burst open**, and **the windows of the skies were opened**.¹² And there was rain upon the land for forty days and forty nights.

*Key Words Adapted by Teacher

These phrases refer to the author's ancient conception of the waters above and below, which were separated on day two of Genesis. These cosmic waters exist and are held at bay only by Yahweh's covenant promise.

Genesis 1:6-8 NASB*

⁶ Then God said, "Let there be an dome in the midst of the waters, and let it separate **the waters** from the **waters**." ⁷ God made the dome, and separated **the waters which were below the dome** from **the waters which were above the dome** and it was so. ⁸ God called the dome heavens/ skies. And there was evening and there was morning, a second day.

*Key Words Adapted by Teacher

Psalm 148:1-6 NASB

¹ Praise the LORD! Praise the LORD from the heavens; praise him in the heights!
² Praise him, all his angels; praise him, all his hosts!
³ Praise him, sun and moon; praise him, all stars of light!
⁴ Praise him, **highest heavens, and the waters that are above the heavens!**
⁵ Let them praise the name of the LORD, for he commanded and they were created.
⁶ He has also **established them forever and ever; he has made a decree which will not pass away.**

Psalm 24:1-2 NASB*

¹ The **land** is the LORD's, and all it contains, the **world**, and those who dwell in it.
² For **he has founded it upon the seas, and established it upon the rivers.**

*Key Words Adapted by Teacher

Psalm 136:5-6 NASB

⁵ [Give thanks] to him who made the heavens with skill, for his lovingkindness is everlasting;
⁶ to **him who spread out the land above the waters**, for his lovingkindness is everlasting ...

Psalm 104:5 NASB*

He established the land upon its foundations, so that it will not totter forever and ever.

*Key Words Adapted by Teacher

In light of the biblical authors' ancient cosmology, the depiction of the flood is neither global nor local. It is cosmic, or, more specifically, the flood is a cosmic collapse, a de-creation narrative. In other words, the depiction of the flood is an attempt to show its cosmic meaning and significance within the divine purpose.

Cosmic Hyperbole and the Flood Design Pattern in the Hebrew Bible

The author gives many clear signals that the flood has cosmic significance and affects the entire created realm. The following list is adapted from *The Lost World of the Flood* by Longman and Walton (2018, 48-49).

- God's perception of humanity in Genesis 6:5-13 includes all humanity, not just those in a local area.
- The flood is clearly portrayed as a reversal of the cosmic order that God established in Genesis 1 and then a re-creation similar to Genesis 1. For the analogy to work, the flood is a cosmic re-creation and not simply a local phenomenon.
- The collapse of the waters above and below in Genesis 7:11 indicates a cosmic event.

- The logic of taking animals on board in pairs, including birds, indicates a cosmic flood not limited to a local area.
- The size of the boat indicates a flood of cosmic proportions.
- The height of the waters as 15 cubits (23 feet) above the mountains of Ararat (Gen. 7:20, 8:4) indicates a cosmic flood.

The author's purpose is to depict a catastrophe of cosmic proportions, which raises an even deeper question. Do the biblical authors ever use cosmic hyperbole (intentional literary exaggeration) to communicate the cosmic importance and significance of an event but not necessarily its actual universal scope?

The answer is yes. Biblical authors regularly use hyperbole to communicate the cosmic meaning of an event. In fact, the flood narrative begins an important design pattern about God's cosmic judgment against humanity's evil, and we often find the same hyperbole at work.

Cosmic Hyperbole in the Ten Plagues on Egypt

Exodus 7:20-25 NASB

²⁰ So Moses and Aaron did even as the LORD had commanded. And he lifted up the staff and struck the water that was in the Nile, in the sight of Pharaoh and in the sight of his servants, and **all the water that was in the Nile was turned to blood.** ²¹ The fish that were in the Nile died, and the Nile became foul, so that the Egyptians could not drink water from the Nile. And the **blood was through all the land of Egypt** ... ²⁴ So all the Egyptians **dug around the Nile for water** to drink, for they could not drink of the water of the Nile. ²⁵ Seven days passed after the LORD had struck the Nile.

Exodus 8:17 NASB

They did so; and Aaron stretched out his hand with his staff, and struck the dust of the earth, and there were gnats on man and beast. **All the dust of the earth became gnats** through all the land of Egypt.

Exodus 9:3-6 NASB

³ Behold, the hand of the LORD will come with a very severe pestilence on your livestock which are in the field, on the horses, on the donkeys, on the camels, on the herds, and on the flocks. ⁴ But the LORD will make a distinction between the livestock of Israel and the livestock of Egypt, so that nothing will die of all that belongs to the sons of Israel ... ⁶ So the LORD did this thing on the next day, and **all the livestock of Egypt died**; but of the livestock of the sons of Israel, not one died.

Exodus 9:22-25 NASB

²² Now the LORD said to Moses, "Stretch out your hand toward the sky, that hail may fall on all the land of Egypt, **on man and on beast and on every plant of the field, throughout the land of Egypt.**" ²³ Moses stretched out his staff toward the sky, and the LORD sent thunder and hail, and fire ran down to the earth. And the LORD rained hail on the land of Egypt. ... ²⁵ The hail struck **all that was in the field through all the land of Egypt**, both man and beast; the hail also struck **every plant of the field** and shattered **every tree of the field.**

Exodus 9:31-32 NASB

³¹ Now the flax and the barley were ruined, for the barley was in the ear and the flax was in bud. ³² But the wheat and the spelt were not ruined, for they ripen late.

Exodus 10:21-23 NASB

²¹ Then the LORD said to Moses, "Stretch out your hand toward the sky, that there may be darkness over the land of Egypt, even a darkness which may be felt." ²² So Moses stretched out his hand toward the sky, and there was **thick darkness in all the land of Egypt** for three days. ²³ They did not see one another, nor did anyone rise from his place for three days, but all the sons of Israel had light in their dwellings.

Notice how the leading statements about the plague are cosmic in scope ("all the water," "all the plants"), but they are followed by a qualification that all doesn't technically mean all: There is still water to drink and there are plants that survived the hail.

Cosmic Hyperbole in the Conquest of the Canaanites

Joshua 10:40-42 NASB

⁴⁰ Thus Joshua struck **all the land**, the hill country and the Negev and the lowland and the slopes and **all their kings**. He left **no survivor**, but he utterly destroyed **all who breathed**, just as the LORD, the God of Israel, had commanded. ⁴¹ Joshua struck them from Kadesh-barnea even as far as Gaza, and all the country of Goshen even as far as Gibeon. ⁴² Joshua captured **all these kings** and their lands **at one time**, because the LORD, the God of Israel, fought for Israel.

Joshua 11:16-17 NASB

¹⁶ Thus Joshua took **all that land**: the hill country and all the Negev, **all that land** of Goshen, the lowland, the Arabah, the hill country of Israel and its lowland ¹⁷ from Mount Halak, that rises toward Seir, even as far as Baal-gad in the valley of Lebanon at the foot of Mount Hermon. And he captured **all their kings** and struck them down and put them to death.

Joshua 11:23 NASB

So Joshua took **all the land**, according to all that the LORD had spoken to Moses, and Joshua gave it for an inheritance to Israel according to their divisions by their tribes. Thus the land had rest from war.

From these summary statements, the reader naturally concludes that the entire land of Canaan was now in Israel's possession and that all hostile kings had been eliminated. But notice the opening sentences of the very next chapter.

Joshua 13:1-5 NASB

¹ Now Joshua was old and advanced in years when Yahweh said to him, "You are old and advanced in years, **and very much of the land remains to be possessed**." ² This is **the land that remains**: all the regions of the Philistines and all those of the Geshurites; ³ from the Shihor which is east of Egypt, even as far as the border of Ekron to the north (it is counted as Canaanite); the five lords of the Philistines: the Gazite, the Ashdodite,

the Ashkelonite, the Gittite, the Ekronite; and the Avvite ⁴ to the south, all the land of the Canaanite, and Mearah that belongs to the Sidonians, as far as Aphek, to the border of the Amorite; ⁵ and the land of the Gebalite, and all of Lebanon, toward the east, from Baal-gad below Mount Hermon as far as Lebo-hamath.”

“A Bible atlas will show visually that this description encompasses quite a bit of land. Indeed a rough estimate would place the success level at around 50 percent ... In addition, there were some important cities said to be taken by Israel that remained firmly in the hands of Canaanites, most notably Jerusalem and Hebron (see [Josh. 12:10](#)). According to Judges chapter 1, the situation did not change dramatically even after the death of Joshua ([Judg. 1:1](#)), where we hear that Israel had not defeated large swaths of Canaanite territory ... The author is intentionally using universalistic language and intends to convey rhetorically that the conquest was complete. However, this completeness did not correspond to the actual geographical scope of the conquest, but to the significance of the conquest. The use of hyperbole serves to make the theological point ... We recognize that some will have difficulty with the presence of hyperbole in Scripture, even if it is obvious as we have seen in Joshua. Our point is that the biblical authors sometimes use hyperbole ... in a way that they expected their readers to recognize ... as a convention for making theological claims.”

Longman, T. and Walton, J. H. (2018). [The Lost World of the Flood: Mythology, Theology, and the Deluge Debate](#)." IVP Academic. 32-33.

Also, there are cities that are said to have been captured by the Israelites, but later on in the story we find these cities in Canaanite possession.

Narratives of Cities Conquered	Later Narrative Where the Same Cities Are Not Conquered
Joshua 8:17–19 ¹⁷ So not a man was left in Ai or Bethel who had not gone out after Israel, and they left the city unguarded and pursued Israel. ¹⁸ Then the Lord said to Joshua, “Stretch out the javelin that is in your hand toward Ai, for I will give it into your hand.” So Joshua stretched out the javelin that was in his hand toward the city. ¹⁹ The men in ambush rose quickly from their place, and when he had stretched out his hand, they ran and entered the city and captured it, and they quickly set the city on fire. Joshua 12:7, 16 ⁷ Here is a list of the kings of the land that Joshua and the Israelites conquered on the west side of	Judges 1:22–25 ²² Likewise the house of Joseph went up against Bethel, and the LORD was with them. ²³ The house of Joseph spied out Bethel (now the name of the city was formerly Luz). ²⁴ The spies saw a man coming out of the city and they said to him, “Please show us the entrance to the city and we will treat you kindly.” ²⁵ So he showed them the entrance to the city, and they struck the city with the edge of the sword, but they let the man and all his family go free.
<i>Conquest Narrative Cities Before and After.</i> Created by Tim Mackie for BibleProject Classroom: Noah to Abraham (2020).	

Narratives of Cities Conquered	Later Narrative Where the Same Cities Are Not Conquered
the Jordan... ¹⁶ the king of Bethel	
Joshua 10:36–39 ³⁶ Then Joshua and all Israel with him went up from Eglon to Hebron, and they fought against it. ³⁷ They captured it and struck it and its king and all its cities and all the persons who were in it with the edge of the sword. He left no survivor, according to all that he had done to Eglon. And he utterly destroyed it and every person who was in it. ³⁸ Then Joshua and all Israel with him returned to Debir, and they fought against it. ³⁹ He captured it and its king and all its cities, and they struck them with the edge of the sword, and utterly destroyed every person who was in it. He left no survivor. Just as he had done to Hebron, so he did to Debir and its king, as he had also done to Libnah and its king.	Joshua 15:13–17 ¹³ Now he gave to Caleb the son of Jephunneh a portion among the sons of Judah, according to the command of the LORD to Joshua, namely, Kiriath-arba, Arba being the father of Anak (that is, Hebron). ¹⁴ Caleb drove out from there the three sons of Anak: Sheshai and Ahiman and Talmai, the children of Anak. ¹⁵ Then he went up from there against the inhabitants of Debir; now the name of Debir formerly was Kiriath-sepher. ¹⁶ And Caleb said, “The one who attacks Kiriath-sepher and captures it, I will give him Achsah my daughter as a wife.” ¹⁷ Othniel the son of Kenaz, the brother of Caleb, captured it; so he gave him Achsah his daughter as a wife.
<i>Conquest Narrative Cities Before and After.</i> Created by Tim Mackie for BibleProject Classroom: Noah to Abraham (2020).	

In both cases, Bethel, Hebron, and Debir appear in summarizing lists where cities are conquered in a formulaic fashion. But when we come across these same cities later in the narrative, they have not been conquered, and they are filled with Canaanite inhabitants.

Let’s go back to the flood narrative. We noted that the entire flood story from Genesis 6:1-9:27 is a cohesive literary whole that has been placed in between the genealogies of Genesis 5 and 10. If we look before and after the flood narrative, we find pre-flood characters who are still present after the flood.

Pre-Flood Characters	Same Characters After the Flood
The Nephilim in Genesis 6:4 The Nephilim were in the land in those days—and also afterward—when the sons of God went to the daughters of humans and had children by them. These were the heroes of old, men of renown.	Numbers 13:31–33 ³¹ But the men who had gone up with him said, “We can’t attack those people; they are stronger than we are.” ³² And they spread among the Israelites a bad report about the land they had explored. They said, “The land we explored devours those living in it. All the people we saw there are of great size. ³³ We saw the Nephilim there (the descendants of Anak come from the Nephilim). We seemed like grasshoppers in our own eyes, and we looked the same to them.”
The line of Cain Genesis 4:17, 19-21 ¹⁷ Cain had relations with his wife and she conceived, and gave birth to Enoch; and he built a city, and called the name of the city Enoch, after the name of his son. ¹⁹ Lemek married two women, one named Adah and the other Zillah. ²⁰ Adah gave birth to Jabal; the father of those who live in tents and raise livestock. ²¹ His brother’s name was Jubal; he was the father of all who play stringed instruments and pipes.	Genesis 15:18–19 ¹⁸ On that day the LORD made a covenant with Abram and said, “To your descendants I give this land, from the Wadi of Egypt to the great river, the Euphrates— ¹⁹ the land of the Cainites, Kenizzites, Kadmonites, Numbers 24:21–22 ²¹ Then [Balaam] saw the Cainites and spoke his message: “Your dwelling place is secure, your nest is set in a rock; ²² yet you Cainites will be destroyed when Ashur takes you captive.” Judges 4:11 ¹¹ Now Heber the Cainite had separated himself from the Cainites, from the sons of Hobab the father-in-law of Moses, and had pitched his tent as far away as the oak in Zaanannim, which is near Kedesh.
<i>Characters Before and After the Flood.</i> Created by Tim Mackie for BibleProject Classroom: Noah to Abraham (2020).	

Cosmic Hyperbole and the Theological Message of the Biblical Flood Story

The flood narrative seems to be a cosmic portrayal of a real flood that took place in ancient Mesopotamia. The cosmic hyperbole of the biblical account is part of its theological design and communication strategy.

The biblical authors are not deceptive. They intentionally provide a stylized and creative presentation of the flood narrative in order to make theological claims.

The Historicity of the Flood Narrative

We have substantial reason to think that the flood narrative is rooted in ancient Mesopotamian tradition and originates from a real, catastrophic flood during the prehistoric period (namely, before the advent of history writing during the early empires of Sumer and Akkad).

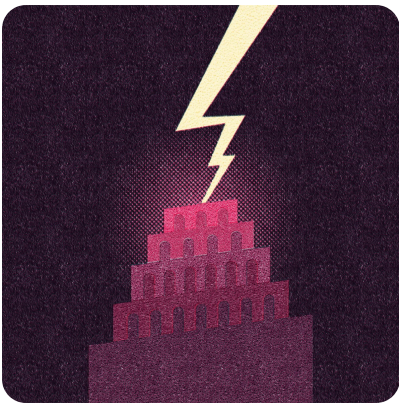
All the flood accounts from Mesopotamia clearly belong to the same general family of traditions that go back beyond the year 2,000 B.C.E. Also, Mesopotamia is a huge flood plain where two large regional rivers merge together.

There is also evidence of occasional catastrophic floods. In the work of William Ryan and Walter Pitman (*Noah's Flood: The New Scientific Discoveries About an Event That Changed History*, 2000), they describe a flood that would date to around 5,600 B.C.E. that explains the geological shape of the divide between eastern Europe and Anatolia (modern day Turkey) and the origins of the Black Sea.

We can clearly see that the biblical flood narrative has been adopted from a Mesopotamian tradition of the flood story and adapted for the theological purposes of the authors.

Reflection Question

What is the significance of the biblical authors' use of flood language in other stories later in the Bible?



Module 6: The Cycle Begins Again

SESSIONS 23-28

Follow the stories about Noah's sons, the origins of the nations, and the founding of Babylon as the pattern is replayed, nuanced, and intensified.

Session 23: God's Covenant With Noah

Key Takeaways

- Noah's drunkenness recalls the foolish failure of the man and woman in the garden of Eden.
- Ham's crime against his family recalls both the failure of Genesis 3 and the escalation of Genesis 4.
- Ham's crime against his family was some form of illicit sexual abuse. The maternal incest (i.e., rape) interpretation of Ham's sin accounts for both the severity of Noah's response and the curse on Canaan.

Noah's Garden and a Family Failure: Translation and Literary Design of Genesis 9:18-29

Noah's Sons: Shem, Ham (= Canaan), and Japheth

- ¹⁸ And the sons of Noah who came out of the ark were **Shem** and **Ham** and **Japheth** ; and **Ham was the father of Canaan** .
- ¹⁹ These three were the sons of Noah, and from these all the land was scattered.

Noah

- ²⁰ **And Noah** began to be a man of the ground and he planted a vineyard;
- ²¹ **and he drank of the wine and became drunk** , and he uncovered himself in the middle of his tent.

Noah's Sons: Ham (= Canaan), Shem and Japheth

- a ²² And **Ham, the father of Canaan** ,
- b **saw the nakedness of his father** ,
-
- a and he reported to **his two brothers** outside.
- b ²³ And **Shem** and **Japheth** took a garment
- a' and they laid it upon the shoulders of **the two of them** ,
-
- a and they walked **backward**

- b and they **covered the nakedness of their father** ;
- a' and their faces were **backward** ,
- b' and the **nakedness of their father they did not see** .

Noah

- 24 **And Noah awoke from his wine** ,
and he knew what his younger son had done to him;

Noah's Sons: Ham (= Canaan), Shem, and Japheth

- 25 and he said,
a "Cursed be **Canaan** ;
b a servant of servants he will be to his brothers."

- 26 And he said,
a "Blessed be Yahweh the Elohim of **Shem** ,
b and let **Canaan** be his servant.

- a 27 May Elohim enlarge **Japheth** ,
a and let him dwell in the tents of **Shem** ,
b and let **Canaan** be his servant."

Noah

- 28 **And Noah** lived, after the flood, three hundred and fifty years.
29 And all the days of Noah were nine hundred and fifty years,
and he died.

Genesis 9:18-29. Translation and Literary Design by Tim Mackie for BibleProject Classroom: Adam to Noah (2020).

Notice the alternating panels going back and forth between the actions and life of Noah and the actions and future destiny of his sons.

The focus on Ham is in reality a focus on Ham's son Canaan, a connection that will be unpacked only in the following chapter (see Gen. 10:6). It's as if Ham's actions toward his father are an archetype of his descendants' behavior (see Lev. 18 and Lev. 20).

Noah's Three Scattered Sons (Gen. 9:18-19)

The author draws attention to the brothers coming out of the ark as one family, yet after leaving the ark, they are divided and scattered (just as Cain and Abel/Seth left Eden and were divided).

The link between the division of Cain and Abel/Seth and the division of Noah's sons is reinforced by the intentional parallelism between the line of Cain leading to Lemek and his three sons in Genesis 4:17-26 and the line of Seth leading to Noah and his three sons in Genesis 5:1-32 and 9:18-19.

Cain's Line Leads to the Flood	Seth's Line Leads to the Scattering of Babylon
1. Adam 2. Cain 3. Enoch 4. Lyrad 5. Mehuya'el 6. Methusha'el 7. Lemek + 3 sons □ Yabal □ Yubal □ Tubal-Cain	1. Adam 2. Seth 3. Enosh 4. Cainan 5. Mahalelel 6. Yered 7. Enoch 8. Methushelah 9. Lemek 10. Noah + 3 sons □ Shem □ Ham □ Japheth
"Yabal, the father of (אבי) tent-dwellers and livestock" (Gen. 4:20) "Yubal, the father of (אבי) all handlers of lyre and flute" (Gen 4:21)	"Ham, the father of (אבי) Canaan" (Gen. 9:18) "Ham, the father of (אבי) Canaan" (Gen. 9:22)
Followed by the episode about sons of God and human women (Gen. 6:1-4)	Followed by the episode about Ham exploiting his father's nakedness (Gen. 9:21-24)
... resulting in the flood (<i>mabbul</i> / מַבּוּל)	... resulting in a curse, that will lead to the scattering of Babylon (<i>babel</i> / בָּבֶל)
<i>Noah's Three Scattered Sons.</i> Created by Tim Mackie for BibleProject Classroom: Noah to Abraham (2020).	

The mention of "scattering" in Genesis 9:19 is the first use of a key word-matrix: *naphats* (נָפַץ) and *puts* (פּוֹץ). These are among the standard words used later in the Prophets to describe Israel's exile among the nations, out of which a remnant (like Noah) will return to Zion.

Isaiah 11:11-12 NASB*

¹¹ Then it will happen on that day that the Lord will again recover the second time with his hand, the remnant of his people who will remain, from Assyria, Egypt, Pathros, Cush, Elam, Shinar, Hamath, and from the islands of the sea.

¹² And he will lift up a standard for the nations

and assemble **the scattered ones** (נפין) of Israel,
and will gather **the dispersed ones** (פון) of Judah
from the four corners of the earth.

*Key Words Adapted by Teacher

Ezekiel 11:17 NIV

Therefore say: “This is what the Sovereign LORD says: I will gather you from the nations and bring you back from the countries where you have been **scattered** (פון), and I will give you back the land of Israel again.”

Zechariah 13:7 NIV

“Awake, sword, against my shepherd, against the man who is close to me!” declares the LORD Almighty.
“Strike the shepherd, and the sheep will be **scattered** (פון), and I will turn my hand against the little ones.”

This “scattered” language is a united thread that extends all the way from Genesis 9:18-19 to the conclusion of the scattering at Babylon.

9:18-19	And the sons of Noah who went out from the ark: Shem, Ham, and Japheth ... and from these (מאלה) all the land (כל הארץ) was scattered (פון)		
	10:5	And from these (מאלה) were separated (פרד) the islands of the nations	
		10:18	And afterward the families of the Canaanites were scattered (פון)
		10:25	And to Eber two sons were born, the name of the first was Peleg, because in his days the land (הארץ) was divided (נפלגה)
	10:32	These are the families of the sons of Noah by their generations with their nations, and from these (מאלה) the nations were separated (פרד) in the land (בארץ) after the flood.	
		11:4	“Come let’s build for ourselves a city ... lest we be scattered (פון) upon the surface of all the land (כל הארץ)
		11:8	And Yahweh scattered them (פון) from there upon the surface of all the land (כל הארץ)
11:9	Therefore the name was called Babylon, because there Yahweh confused the language of all the land (כל הארץ) , and from there Yahweh scattered (פון) them upon the surface of all the land (כל הארץ)		

Scattered Table. Created by Tim Mackie for BibleProject Classroom: Noah to Abraham (2020).

God’s preservation of a remnant (Noah and sons) out of the flood becomes an anticipation of God’s preservation of a remnant (Abraham and sons) out of the scattering of Babylon. And all of these patterns are

designed to anticipate the future preservation of a remnant out of the exile of Judah to Babylon.

Rebellion	Divine Justice	New Eden
Genesis 3-6a Three cycles of rebellion: 1. Garden folly (Gen. 3) 2. Cain: Next generation sins (Gen. 4) 3. Lemek: Next generation sins (Gen. 4) 4. Cosmic rebellion (Gen. 6)	Gen 6:5-8:19 • Flood of divine justice • A remnant (שאר) seed is preserved through the water: Noah + 3 sons (Shem!)	Genesis 8:20-9:17 • Remnant ascends to new Eden • Sacrifices / worship • New Eden blessing / covenant
Genesis 9:18-11:7 Three cycles of rebellion: 1. Garden folly (Gen. 9:20-21) 2. Ham: Next generation sins (Gen. 9:22-28) 3. Nimrod: Next generation sins: Gen. 10:9 4. Cosmic rebellion (Gen. 11:1-7)	Genesis 11:8-32 • Scattering of divine justice • A remnant seed is preserved through the scattering: Terah + 3 sons (Abraham!)	Genesis 12:1-10 • Remnant ascends to new Eden • Sacrifices / worship • New Eden blessing / covenant
Genesis 12-2 Kings Many cycles of rebellion: 1. More garden folly 2. Next generation repeats constantly 3. Cosmic rebellions abound	Genesis 12-2 Kings • Israel's exile due to divine justice • A remnant seed is preserved through the exile (Isa. 4, 11, 40-66) • New sons for Abraham and Sarah (see Isa. 54; Jer. 31)	Isaiah-Jeremiah-Ezekiel • The 12 remnant ascends to new Eden (Isaiah 40-55) • Sacrifices / worship (Isa. 60-62) • New Eden blessing / covenant (Isa. 65-66)
<i>Cycles of Rebellion Macro Design Pattern. Created by Tim Mackie for BibleProject Classroom Noah to Abraham (2020).</i>		

Noah's Failure, Ham's Fall, and the Division of the Brothers (Gen. 9:20-24)

Noah's Foolish Failure

This cryptic and disturbing story has been placed here so that the reader sees a replay of the twin stories of folly and rebellion in Genesis 3-4.

Genesis 9:18-27: Noah's Folly and Ham's "Fall"	Genesis 2-3: Humanity's "Fall"
9:20 Noah was a "man of the ground" (איש האדמה)	3:23 Humanity "works the ground" (לעבד את האדמה)
9:20-21 Noah drinks from his vineyard which he planted (נטע)	3:5-6 Humanity eats from the tree which Yahweh planted 2:8 (נטע)
9:22 Ham saw (וירא) the nakedness of his father	3:7 Humanity's eyes are opened to see (ויראו) their own nakedness
9:22 Ham told (ויגד) his two brothers about his father's nakedness (ערות אביו)	3:11 "Who told (יגיד) you that you were naked (ערום)?"
9:23 Shem and Japheth cover (כסה) their father's nakedness (ערוה), so they do not see (ראה) it	3:7 "And they knew they were naked, and they sewed leaves of a fig tree and made for themselves coverings (חגרה)" 3:21 God makes animal skin (עור) coverings for humanity's nakedness
9:24 Noah awoke from his wine and he knew (וידע) what his son had done to him (עשה לו)	3:7, 13 The eyes of the two of them were opened and they knew (וידעו) they were naked ... "What is this you have done (עשית)?"
9:25 Canaan is cursed (ארור)	3:14, 17 The serpent and the ground are cursed (ארור)
Noah's Folly and Humanity's Fall. Created by Tim Mackie for BibleProject Classroom: Noah to Abraham (2020).	

This strange story depicts Noah's folly as a moral failure rather than a rebellion. Getting drunk does not violate a divine command as such, but it is a foolish act that exposes him to danger. In fact, this text is the first of many in the Hebrew Bible that shows the perils of alcohol abuse and its foolish, self-humiliating consequences.

Proverbs 23:31-35 Instructor's Translation

³¹ Do not see that (כי + ראה) the wine (יין) is red (אדם),
when it offers its eye (עין) in the cup,
when it walks (יתהלך) down smoothly.

³² At the last it bites like a snake (נחש)
and stings like a viper.

³³ Your eyes will see (עין + ראה) strange things
and your heart will utter perverse things.

34 You will be like one lying down in the heart of the seas,
 lying on top of the mast.
 35 “They hit me,” you will say, “but I’m not hurt!
 They beat me up, but I don’t know (יָדַעַ) it!
 When can I wake up, so I can find another drink?”

This poem about wine in [Proverbs 23:31-35](#) is saturated with vocabulary from the Eden narrative as well as the flood narrative. This poet is aware of the wine//deception//snake design pattern that links Genesis 3 and 9:20-21 together in a parallel relationship.

Ham’s Crime Against His Family

The above link between Ham looking upon his father’s nakedness as a result of Noah’s eating the fruit of the garden is an excellent example of “dynamic analogy.” For more information, see Jonathan Grossman’s article “Dynamic Analogies in Esther.”

Adam, Eve, and Cain	Noah and Ham
Genesis 3 Eve sees the fruit and eats with Adam “and they knew that they were naked ”	Genesis 9:20-21 Noah eats of the fruit of the vineyard, becomes exposed ... “and he knew what his son did to him”
Genesis 4 The son Cain is angry and separates from his brother to kill him	Genesis 9:22-24 The son Ham sees the nakedness of his father and separates from his brothers in a shameful act
<i>Ham’s Crime Echoes Genesis 3 and 4. Created by Tim Mackie for BibleProject Classroom: Noah to Abraham (2020).</i>	

Noah repeats, in his own way, the folly of Adam and Eve because eating the garden fruit leads to nakedness and exposure to humiliation.

Ham, however, repeats both the folly of Adam and Eve (since they set the paradigm for human folly) and the rebellion of Cain in the heinous act that divides the brotherhood. This is why Ham’s story activates the vocabulary of both Genesis 3 and 4. He is replaying the fundamental human folly, as well as choosing (like Cain) his own destructive path that will ruin his family.

There is also an important connection here with Ezekiel 18 and Jeremiah 31, where the prophets deconstruct the proverb that “the parents eat sour grapes, but the children’s teeth suffer” ([Ezek. 18:2](#); [Jer. 31:29](#)).

The prophets and Genesis 1-11 disagree with this proverb. Each generation may live within the environment created by the sin of their ancestors, but it is their own choices that create their ultimate destiny. This argument in Ezekiel and Jeremiah is addressed to an exilic audience, and it’s likely that this same theme in Genesis 1-11 is compositionally related.

The same dynamics are at work in the David narrative, where his sin with Bathsheba (Gen. 3) and his murder of Uriah (Gen. 4) is repeated by his three children: Amnon rapes Tamar (Gen. 3) and Absalom murders Amnon (Gen. 4).

“Ham, the father of Canaan” (Gen. 9:18, 22)

Why does the narrator tell us twice in this cryptic story that Ham is the father of Canaan? It’s part of a compositional strategy to compare Ham’s line to Cain’s line because Cain gave birth to a line ending with Lemek and his three sons.

Cain's Four Sons (Gen. 4:18-22)	Ham's Four Sons (Gen. 9:18-22; 10:6)
+1 Lemek 1. Yabal 2. Yubal 3. Tubal-Cain	1. Cush 2. Egypt/Mizraim 3. Put +1 Canaan
“Yabal, the father of (אָבִי) tent-dwellers and livestock” (Gen. 4:20)	“Ham, the father of (אָבִי) Canaan” (Gen. 9:18)
“Yubal, the father of (אָבִי) all handlers of lyre and flute” (Gen 4:21)	“Ham, the father of (אָבִי) Canaan” (Gen. 9:22)
Cain's and Ham's Sons. Created by Tim Mackie for BibleProject Classroom: Noah to Abraham (2020).	

In Cain’s line, the three sons of Lemek are grouped together by similar names so that Lemek stands out, and he is the one who replays the sin of Cain. Ham’s line is inverted so that Canaan is the fourth one who sticks out.

In this way, the narrator hints that just as Cain’s own murderous act was magnified by his descendant Lemek, so also will Ham’s shameful act be magnified by his descendant Canaan. And, of course, Leviticus 18 and 20 make this crystal clear.

The Sin of Ham Against His Father (Gen. 9:22-24)

Two key questions have arisen in the history of interpretation of this cryptic story. For more information, see “Noah’s Nakedness and the Curse on Canaan” from *Journal of Biblical Literature* (Hahn and Bergsma, 2005).

- 1. What did Ham do to his father in the tent?
- 2. Why does Ham’s action result in a curse on his son Canaan?

Numerous interpretations of Ham’s crime against his father throughout history have attempted to answer these two questions.

Voyeurism

Ham's offense was his shameful gaze at the indecent exposure of his father. This view has simplicity as a strength, but it doesn't explain the gravity of the action or why Noah responds with such ferocity.

Paternal incest (i.e., rape)

Ham's offense was to sexually abuse his father, a shocking act. This view is built on an important insight, that the words "to look at the nakedness of ..." (ערוה + ראה) are a biblical Hebrew figure of speech that refers to sexual intercourse. The phrase is also used of Noah in his tent, that his nakedness "was uncovered" (גלה).

Leviticus 20:17 NASB

If there is a man who takes his sister, his father's daughter or his mother's daughter, so that **he sees her nakedness** (ערוה + ראה) and **she sees his nakedness** (ראה + ערוה), it is a disgrace; and they shall be cut off in the sight of the sons of their people. He has **uncovered his sister's nakedness** (ערוה + גלה); he bears his guilt.

Leviticus 18:6 NASB

None of you shall approach any blood relative of his to **uncover nakedness** (ערוה + גלה); I am the LORD.

Ezekiel 16:36 NASB

Thus says the Lord GOD, "Because your lewdness was poured out and your **nakedness uncovered** (ערוה + גלה) through your harlotries with your lovers and with all your detestable idols, and because of the blood of your sons which you gave to idols ..."

See also Ezekiel 22:10, 23:10, 23:18, 23:29. In all of these texts, the phrase "to see/uncover nakedness" means to have sex with someone.

This interpretation also makes sense of the wording in Genesis 9:24 that Noah woke up "and he knew what his son had done to him."

This interpretation also makes sense of the accompanying imagery of wine, vineyards, and tents, all of which can have erotic associations (such as David getting Uriah drunk with wine so that he'll have sex with Bathsheba in 2 Sam. 11:11-13, or the erotic garden imagery in the Song of Songs 1:2, 4, 6; 2:13, 15; 5:1; 6:11, etc.).

The paternal incest view also provides a motive for Ham, namely, to shame and dishonor his father in an act of sexual domination, thereby displacing his father and brothers as the head of the family.

This story also forms an inclusio frame around the entire flood narrative as it matches another story of illicit boundary-crossing sex: the sons of God and the human daughters in Genesis 6:1-4.

This story also links forward verbally and thematically to the destruction of Sodom and Gomorrah (which is packed with verbal allusions to the flood). That story also begins and ends with stories of illicit sex.

- Genesis 19:4-5: The men of Sodom gather to gang rape the two angels.
- Genesis 19:30-38: Lot's daughters get him drunk with wine and have sex with their father, resulting in the birth of the Moabites and Ammonites.

This illicit sex theme forms the same inverted inclusio around the Sodom and Gomorrah narrative that Genesis 6:1-4 and Genesis 9:20-24 form around the flood story.

	Flood	Sodom
Before	Angels (Males) → Humans (Females)	Humans (Males) → Angels (Males)
After	Son (Males) → Father (Males)	Daughters (Females) → Father (Males)
<i>Flood and Sodom Thematic Framing. Created by Tim Mackie for BibleProject Classroom: Noah to Abraham (2020).</i>		

The **flood** concludes with a view toward the offspring of Ham (**Canaanites**), and the **Sodom and Gomorrah** narrative concludes with a view toward the offspring of Lot (**Ammonites and Moabites**), and both stories are associated somehow with incest (גיוי עריות).

Based on all these factors, it's likely the biblical authors expected readers to make the connection to the paternal incest interpretation. But there is a final alternative to the paternal incest interpretation that potentially carries even more explanatory power.

Maternal Incest

In this view, Ham actually had sex with his mother, not his father Noah. The connections between this story and Leviticus 18 force the reader to take a closer look at these two chapters.

Leviticus 18 opens in a way that clearly shows awareness of the story of Ham in Genesis 9.

Leviticus 18:1-8 NASB*

¹ Then the LORD spoke to Moses, saying,

² "Speak to the sons of Israel and say to them, 'I am Yahweh your God.

³ You shall not do what is done in the land of **Egypt** where you lived, nor are you to do what is done in the land of **Canaan** where I am bringing you; you shall not walk in their statutes ...

⁵ So you shall keep my statutes and my judgments, by which a man may live if he does them; I am the LORD.

⁶ None of you shall approach any blood relative of his to **uncover nakedness** (גילה + ערוה); I am the LORD.

⁷ You shall not **uncover the nakedness of your father**, it is the **nakedness of your mother**. She is your mother; you are not to **uncover her nakedness**.

⁸ You shall not uncover the **nakedness of your father's wife**; it is your **father's nakedness**."

*Key Words Adapted by Teacher

The logic here is very clear and is based on the covenant concept of marriage expressed in Genesis 2:24. When the two become one flesh, they are, so to speak, each other's flesh, so to have sex with one is to have sex with the other.

Leviticus 18:8 is very explicit: to "uncover the nakedness of your father" means "to have sex with your mother."

It cannot be a coincidence that the first example in Leviticus 18, a chapter entirely about avoiding family incest, is about one's father and mother. And this is right after the mention of "what is done in the land of Canaan."

This view is also confirmed by numerous later design patterns, where sons attempt to shame or gain a position of authority over their father by sleeping with their wife (or wives).

- Reuben sleeps with Bilhah, his father's slave-wife (Gen. 35:22)
- Absalom sleeps with his father's harem (2 Sam. 16:21-22)
- Adonijah's attempt with sleep with David's slave-wife Abishag (1 Kgs. 2:13-25)

This view also provides a motive for Noah to curse Ham's son Canaan instead of Ham himself because the text implies that Canaan is the son of this illicit sexual act with Noah's wife.

"Noah becomes drunk and disrobes in the tent in preparation for intercourse with his wife, but is incapacitated by his drunkenness (v. 21). Ham enters and 'sees his father's nakedness,' that is, engages in relations with his father's wife (v. 22a). He exits and informs his brothers of his grasp at familial power (v. 22b), perhaps producing an article of clothing as proof of his claim. The brothers, in turn, act with excessive filial deference and piety in returning 'the garment' to their humiliated father, avoiding not only the figurative 'seeing of the fathers nakedness' (i.e., maternal incest) but the literal as well. In the aftermath of the event, Noah curses the product of Ham's illicit union, namely, Canaan, and blesses Shem and Japheth for their piety."

Bergsma, J. and Hahn, S. (2005). "Noah's Nakedness and the Curse on Canaan (Genesis 9:20-27)." *Journal of Biblical Literature*, 124 (1). 38-39.

This explains why, in the narrative, Ham is twice identified as "the father of Canaan." This is a signal to the reader that the story is about how Ham became the father of Canaan.

This provides a more precise parallel to the story about the daughters of Lot in Genesis 19:30-37, where a child takes advantage of their parent's drunkenness so they can produce offspring.

This interpretation also provides a parallel origin story of the Canaanites, Moabites, and Ammonites, who are Israel's neighbors and adversaries.

Reflection Question

What are some of the specific parallels between Genesis 2-4 and Genesis 9:18-24?

Session 24: Reflecting on the Sin of Ham

Key Takeaways

- The Bible has a multilayered depiction of election. The failure of the Canaanites later in the story is not caused by Noah's curse on Canaan.
- The third or fourth generation in biblical terms means "a few" or "however many."
- God's judgment of three or four generations of those who hate him is contrasted with his showing love to thousands of generations. God's ultimate purpose is to walk with people in eternal covenant loyalty.



This session has no other notes

Reflection Question

Do you have any other questions or challenges related to this troubling episode in the biblical story?

Session 25: Blessing and Cursing Noah's Sons

Key Takeaways

- The genealogies of Genesis 10 are a form of symbolic ethnogeography. Later authors will use the established cast of characters and places to emphasize and subvert expected roles.
- Other people dwelling in the tents of Shem is a hopeful picture of God bringing blessing and reconciliation to all nations through the line of Shem.

The Blessing and Curse of Noah Upon His Sons

Genesis 9:25-27 Instructor's Translation

²⁵ And he said:

"Cursed be **Canaan**,
a **servant of servants**
he will be **to his brothers**."

²⁶ And he said:

"Blessed be Yahweh,
God of **Shem**,
and may Canaan be a **servant to him/them**."

²⁷ May God enlarge **Japheth**,

and may he dwell in the tents of **Shem**
and may **Canaan** be a **servant to him/them**."

Like Cain who also wronged a family member, Ham has aligned himself with the serpent through a replay of Adam and Eve's foolish rebellion. And so Ham's offspring Canaan, based on the maternal incest interpretation, is brought under the curse like Cain. Just as the snake became subject to humiliation in the dust because the seed of the woman will crush him (Gen. 3:15), so here the seed of Ham will be humiliated and become a slave to his brothers.

A glance forward to Genesis 10:15-18 shows us that the seed of Canaan will produce a large number of tribes who are hostile to the Israelites as they enter the land of Canaan.

#	People	Where Else They Appear
1	¹⁵ Canaan became the father of ...	Canaan/Canaanite: A geographical term to refer to all of the various tribes who were indigenous to the land of Canaan (borders described in Gen. 10:19). • Neutral to the Israelites: Gen. 12:6, 13:7, 50:11 • Hostile to the Israelites: Gen. 34:30; Exod. 15:15; Num. 13:29, 14:43-45, 21:1; Josh. 5:1, 7:9, 9:1; Judg. 1:1-17, 27-33; 3:3; 4:2, 23-24 • A religious/cultural "danger" to the Israelites: Gen. 24:3, 37; Exod. 23:23, 28; 33:2; 34:11; Josh. 14:1, 16:10
2	Sidon, his firstborn,	Sidon/Sidonians: The coastal region-city north of Canaan (modern Lebanon) • Friendly: 1 Kgs. 5:6, 17:9; Ezra 3:7 • Hostile: Josh. 11:8, 13:6; Judg. 3:3, 10:12 • Religious danger: Judg. 10:6; 1 Kgs. 11:1, 5; 16:31; 2 Kgs. 23:13 • Enslaved to Assyria and Babylon: Isa. 23:12; Jer. 25:22, 27:3, 47:4; Ezek. 27:8, 28:21-22
3	and Heth	Heth/Hittites: The region/tribe who inhabited Asia-Minor (modern Turkey) and migrated SE to inhabit Canaan • Friendly: Gen. 23, 49:29-30, 50:13; 1 Sam. 26:6; 2 Sam. 11; 1 Kgs. 10:29 • Hostile: Exod. 23:28, 34:11; Deut. 7:1, 20:17; Josh. 3:10, 9:1, 24:11 • Religious danger: Gen. 26:34, 27:46, 36:2; 1 Kgs. 11:1 • Enslaved to Israel: 1 Kgs. 9:20
4	¹⁶ and the Jebusite	Jebus/Jebusite: The tribe who inhabited ancient Jerusalem, called Jebus when it was a Canaanite city • Friendly: 2 Sam. 24:16, 18 • Hostile: Exod. 23:23, 34:11; Numb. 13:29; Deut. 7:1, 20:17; Josh. 9:1, 11:3, 15:63; Judg. 1:21; 2 Sam. 5:6-8 • Enslaved to Israel: 1 Kgs. 9:20
5	and the Amorite	A people who inhabited the upper Euphrates region; they spoke a Semitic language (Akkadian at Mari); many migrated into Canaan in the period of Abraham • Friendly/neutral: Gen. 14:13; 1 Sam. 7:14; 2 Sam. 21:2 • Hostile: Gen. 48:22; Exod. 23:23, 33:2, 34:11; Num. 13:29, 21:21-32 (Sihon), 32:39; Deut. 1:4, 27; 2:24; 3:8; 7:1; 20:17; Josh. 5:1, 9:1, 10:5-6, 24:11-12; Judg. 1:34-35 • Religious danger: Gen. 15:16, 21; Josh. 24:15, 18; Judg. 6:10; 1 Kgs. 21:26; 2 Kgs. 21:11 • Associated with the Nephilim giants Sihon and Og: Num. 21; Deut. 1:4, 27;
The Families of Canaan. Created by Tim Mackie for BibleProject Classroom: Noah to Abraham (2020).		

#	People	Where Else They Appear
		3:8; Amos 2:9-10 • Associated with Canaanite Jerusalem: Ezek. 16:3, 45
6	and the Girgashite	A tribe in the land of Canaan • Only ever mentioned in a list of Canaanite peoples: Gen. 15:21; Deut. 7:1; Josh. 3:10, 24:1
7	¹⁷ and the Hivite	A tribe in the land of Canaan • Friendly: Hivites = Gibeonites in Josh. 9:7, 11:19 • Hostile: Gen. 34:2 (Shechem and Hamor); Josh. 9:1, 11:3, 24:11; Judg. 3:3 • Religious danger: Gen. 36:2; Judg. 3:3 • Hostile: Exod. 23:23, 33:2, 34:11; Deut. 7:1, 20:17 • Enslaved to Israel: 1 Kgs. 9:20
8	and the Arkite	A Canaanite tribe; mentioned only in this genealogy and 1 Chron. 1:15
9	and the Sinite	A Canaanite tribe; mentioned only here and 1 Chron. 1:15
10	¹⁸ and the Arvadite	Arvad: A Northern Phoenecian island town (paired with Sidon in Ezek. 27:8, 11); a Canaanite tribe; mentioned only here and 1 Chron. 1:15
11	and the Zemarite	A city in the upper/Euphrates (likely mentioned in Ezek. 27:8); mentioned only here and 1 Chron. 1:16
12	and the Hamathite;	An Aramean city on the Orontes river north of Canaan • Friendly: 2 Sam. 8:9 • Hostile: 2 Kgs. 14:25-28 • Enslaved to Assyria and Babylon: 2 Kgs. 17:24, 30; Jer. 39:5, 49:23
and afterward the families of the Canaanite were scattered.		
<i>The Families of Canaan.</i> Created by Tim Mackie for BibleProject Classroom: Noah to Abraham (2020).		

In particular, the slave status of the Canaanites to their brothers anticipates the subjugation of these tribes by the Israelites (see [Deut. 7:1-2](#); [Josh. 11-12](#); [Judg. 1](#)).

However, just as Cain was not destined to be the seed of the woman or the snake by lineage, so also Ham's choice does not seal the fate of his descendants. Rather, it will be their own replay of Ham's illicit sexual behavior that gets them vomited out of the land (see [Lev. 18:24-28](#)).

“[T]he Canaanites are notorious throughout the Old Testament for their aberrant sexual practices, and [Leviticus 18:3](#) links both Egypt and Canaan as peoples whose habits are abominable: ‘You shall not do as they do in the land of Egypt ... and ... as they do in the land of Canaan.’ Ham’s indiscretion towards his father may easily be seen as a type of the later behavior of the Egyptians and Canaanites. Noah’s curse on Canaan thus represents God’s sentence on the sins of the Canaanites, which their forefather Ham had exemplified.”

Wenham, Gordon J. (1987). [Word Biblical Commentary, Vol. 1: Genesis 1-15](#). Thomas Nelson. 201.

However, not all Hamites or Canaanites will repeat the sins of their ancestors; many will turn and give their allegiance to Yahweh, like Tamar, Rahab, and the Hivite-Gibeonites. And some apparently never gave up the worship of Yaweh, like Melchizedek in Genesis 14.

Is this a declarative curse or a request of the righteous before God?

“Is Noah praying and wishing that Canaan will be cursed, or is Canaan cursed because Noah has pronounced the anathema? Does ... [he] mean ‘Cursed be Canaan’ or ‘Cursed is Canaan’? Now, there is no doubt that ‘cursed,’ when spoken by God, is declarative ... (Gen. 3:14, 17-19; 4:11). But does ‘cursed’ have one nuance in the divine mouth and another nuance in the human mouth? Here the optative thrust [= petition to God] seems preferable, for ‘cursed,’ a passive participle, is followed by four jussive requests (‘may he be ...,’ vv. 26-27; ‘may he enlarge,’ v. 27, and probably ‘may he dwell,’ v. 27). That Noah appeals to God in v. 27 also lifts the words of Noah out of the area of potent magic and into the realm of request.”

Hamilton, Victor P. (1990). [The Book of Genesis, Chapters 1-17](#). Eerdmans. 324.

A Blessing for Yahweh of Shem

Interestingly, in contrast to Canaan’s curse, Shem is not blessed himself. Rather, Yahweh is blessed and identified as the deity of Shem. Yahweh’s covenant name is entrusted to Shem alone among the brothers; this is a subtle hint that it will be Shem’s lineage that carries forward the seed of the woman (Gen. 3:15, 4:26).

“This is then the first intimation that the line of God’s election blessing is going through Shem (cf. 4:26). The phrase ‘the Lord, the God of Shem,’ indeed anticipates many similar expressions in later texts, e.g., ‘the Lord, the God of Abraham’ [your fathers, Israel, etc.] ([24:27](#); [Exod 3:15](#), [32:27](#), [34:23](#)).”

Wenham, Gordon J. (1987). [Word Biblical Commentary, Vol. 1: Genesis 1-15](#). Thomas Nelson. 202.

Canaan’s subjugation to Shem points forward to the narrative fulfillment in the period of Joshua (kind of). While the Israelites will make some descendants of Ham their slaves (the Canaanites), there will be many sons of Ham who in fact make slaves out of the sons of Shem and Ham: Egypt, Assyria, and most notably, Babylon.

A Future for Japheth ... and Shem ... and Canaan

Noah’s words for Japheth (יָפֶֿתֿ) play on his name in Hebrew, Yephet (יֵפֶֿתֿ). The name comes from the root patah = “to make large.” Noah anticipates that Japheth’s territory will be expanded in the future.

The enlarging of Japheth invites the reader to study the list of Japheth’s descendants in Genesis 10:2-5.

Genesis 10:2-5 NASB*

² The sons of Japheth:

Gomer and Magog and Madai and Javan and Tubal and Meshech and Tiras.

³ The sons of Gomer were Ashkenaz and Riphath and Togarmah.

⁴ The sons of Javan were Elishah and Tarshish, Kittim and Dodanim.

⁵ From these the islands of the nations were separated into their lands ...

*Key Words Adapted by Teacher

Here we find tribes and nations that mostly make up ancient Anatolia (Roman Asia Minor, modern Turkey) and Greece. Noah anticipates that these tribes and nations will enlarge their territory and make their way into the territory of Shem.

“May he dwell in the tents of Shem” could be interpreted in two different ways.

“To displace, to disinherit”

There are some contexts where one group “dwelling in the tent” of another is the result of conflict and dispossession.

Psalms 78:55 NASB

[Yahweh] also drove out the nations before them, and apportioned them for an inheritance by measurement, and made the tribes of Israel **dwell in their tents**.

1 Chronicles 5:10 NASB*

In the days of Saul they made war with the Hagrites, who fell by their hand, so that they **dwelt in their tents** throughout all the land east of Gilead.

*Key Words Adapted by Teacher

On this reading, Noah’s words anticipate a future conflict between all of his children where Japheth dispossess Shem from his tent and makes Canaan his slave. Many texts throughout the Hebrew Bible activate this meaning. For example, this meaning is possible when the nations at war with Israel are from Japheth, or when a future conflict is anticipated between Israel and the nations.

In Genesis 14, five kings of the east (two from Ham and two from Japheth) come to enslave four rebellious kings of Canaan. In the conflict, Lot, a descendant of Shem, is taken captive. Abram, a son of Shem, and two Canaanite allies defeat the five kings and restore the captives. The Canaanite priest king Melchizedek also appears in this narrative, and he worships the creator God and blesses Abram.

The pagan prophet Balaam speaks about the future conflict between Noah’s sons (Num. 24:23-24). He speaks of a descendant of Japheth, the Kittim, who will come to oppress Asshur (from Ham and Shem) and Eber (from Shem).

This conflict is expanded and developed in Daniel 7:12 in the sequence of empires leading up to the final beast and horn that will displace the sons of Ham (Assyria and Babylon) and Shem (the Israelites) in terms of political power in the land promised to Abraham.

Noah's blessing on Japheth and its relation to the table of nations in Genesis 10 is also behind Ezekiel's fascinating oracle about Gog of Magog. Magog is a seed of Japheth and rules over his brothers Meshek and Tubal. He also brings the sons of Ham (Cush and Put) and non-Israelite sons of Shem (Persia/Elam) as mercenaries in his war with Israel after its restoration from exile. Ezekiel brings together the common Day of Yahweh motif where Yahweh destroys the seed of the serpent from among the nations (see [Isa. 13-14](#); [Joel 3-4](#); [Zech. 14](#)).

"To live together with"

Living in the same tent is an image of unity in some texts.

Psalm 15:1 NIV*

Yahweh, who may **dwell in your sacred tent** ? Who may live on your holy mountain?

*Key Words Adapted by Teacher

The ideal state of God's covenant people is to "dwell in his tent," that is, to live with him in peace and harmony.

Job 11:14-15 NIV

¹⁴ If you put away the sin that is in your hand and allow no evil **to dwell in your tent** ,

¹⁵ then, free of fault, you will lift up your face; you will stand firm and without fear.

Job's friends accuse him of living in unity with evil, which must be why he's suffering.

Psalm 120:5 NIV

Woe to me that I **dwell** in Meshek, that I **live among the tents** of Kedar!

The poet laments that he has to live in the tents of Meshek (a descendant of Japheth) and Kedar (a son of Ishmael).

On this reading, Noah's words anticipate a day when all of his sons will live together in peace so that the "nations" (sons of Japheth) would be incorporated into the "tents of Shem," that is, experience Yahweh's covenant blessings.

- Genesis [12:1-3](#), [17:3-8](#), and [22:15-18](#) all point to this incorporation of the nations into the blessing of Abraham's family.
- [Isaiah 2:1-4](#) and [chapter 60](#) depict this gathering of the nations to live in the new Jerusalem and experience its abundance.
- [Zechariah 2:10-13](#) and [8:23](#) depict this same inclusion of the nations in the post-exile restoration of God's covenant people.

Zechariah 2:10-11 NASB

¹⁰ "Sing for joy and be glad, O daughter of Zion; for behold I am coming and I will dwell in your midst," declares the LORD. ¹¹ "Many nations will join themselves to the LORD in that day and will become my

people. Then I will dwell in your midst, and you will know that the LORD of hosts has sent me to you.”

Interestingly, Zechariah 14 brings together both potential meanings of Genesis 9:27. First there is a great conflict between the sons of Noah, resulting in a remnant among the nations that comes to the new Jerusalem to experience its Eden blessings.

Zechariah 14:1-3, 9-11, 16 NASB

¹ Behold, a day is coming for Yahweh when the spoil taken from you will be divided among you. ² For I will gather all the nations against Jerusalem to battle ... ³ Then Yahweh will go forth and fight against those nations, as when he fights on a day of battle. ...

⁹ And the LORD will be King over all the earth; in that day Yahweh will be the only one, and his name the only one. ¹⁰ All the land will be changed into a plain from Geba to Rimmon south of Jerusalem; but Jerusalem will rise and remain on its site from Benjamin's Gate as far as the place of the First Gate to the Corner Gate, and from the Tower of Hananel to the king's wine presses. ¹¹ People will live in it, and there will no longer be a curse, for Jerusalem will dwell in security. ...

¹⁶ Then it will come about that any who are remaining of all the nations that went against Jerusalem will go up from year to year to worship the King, Yahweh of hosts, and to celebrate the Feast of Booths.

“If the dwelling of Japheth in the tents of Shem presupposes the conquest of the land of Shem by Japheth, it is a blessing not only to Japheth, but to Shem also, since, whilst Japheth enters into the spiritual inheritance of Shem, he brings to Shem all the good of this world (see Isa. 60). ‘The fulfilment,’ as Delitzsch says, ‘is plain enough, for we are all Japhethites dwelling in the tents of Shem; and the language of the New Testament is the language of Javan entered into the tents of Shem.’ ... Moreover it is true of the blessing and curse of Noah, as of all prophetic utterances, that they are fulfilled with regard to the nations and families in question as a whole, but do not predict, like an irresistible fate, the unalterable destiny of every individual; on the contrary, they leave room for freedom of personal decision, and no more cut off the individuals in the accursed race from the possibility of conversion, or close the way of salvation against the penitent, than they secure the individuals of the family blessed against the possibility of falling from a state of grace, and actually losing the blessing. Hence, whilst a Rahab and an Araunah were received into the fellowship of Jehovah, and the Canaanitish woman was relieved by the Lord because of her faith, the hardened Pharisees and scribes had woes pronounced upon them, and Israel was rejected because of its unbelief.”

Keil, C. F. and Delitzsch, F. (1996). [*Commentary on the Old Testament, Volume 1*](#). Hendrickson Publishers. 101.

Noah's words invite us to ponder this portrait of the future of nations, using the patterns of Genesis 1-11 to anticipate just where the story is going. The table of nations, then, becomes a palette of future hope. The stories to follow, from Genesis 11 to the end of 2 Kings, all work out the programmatic poems in Genesis 3:14-15 and 9:25-27. There will be hostility between the seed of the woman and the seed of the snake.

- When the nations are at war, they are giving into the power of the snake that is luring them into jealous and angry violence (see “Gog of Magog” in [Ezek. 38-39](#)).
- When the nations become a “tent of Yahweh,” then humanity will see that they are brothers who can live together in peace ([Ps. 133](#); Isa. 2:1-4).

The Division of Noah's Sons: Macro Literary Design of Genesis 10:1-32

Sons Are Born

¹ And these are the generations of the sons of Noah, Shem, Ham, and Japheth, and there were born to them sons after the flood.

Sons of Japheth

Seven Sons" of Japheth

² Gomer, Magog, Madai, Yavan, Tubal, Meshek, Tiras

Seven "Grandsons" of Japheth

³⁻⁴ Gomer's sons: Ashkenaz, Riphath, Togarmah

Yavan's sons: Elishah, Tarshish, Kittim, Dodanim

Conclusion

⁵ From these separated the islands of the nations in their lands, each into their language, into their families, by their nations.

Sons of Ham

Four Sons of Ham

⁶ Cush, Egypt, Put, Canaan

Seven Sons and Grandsons of Cush

⁷ Cush: Seba, Havilah, Sabtah, Ra'amah, Sabtekah

Ra'amah: Sheba, Dedan

Narrative About Nimrod Building Babylon and Nineveh

⁸⁻⁹ Cush bore Nimrod (נמרד • *we will rebel*), he began (החל) to be a mighty warrior (גבור) in the land. He was a mighty warrior hunter (גבור ציד) before Yahweh, therefore it is said, "Like Nimrod, a mighty warrior hunter (גבור) before Yahweh."

¹⁰ The beginning of his kingdom (ממלכתו) was Babylon ... in the land of Shinar

¹¹⁻¹² From that land he (= Nimrod) went out to Assyria and Asshur built (בנה) Nineveh ... that is the great city (העיר הגדולה)

Seven Sons of Egypt + the Philistines

¹³⁻¹⁴ Ludim, 'Anamim, Lehabim, Naphtuhim, Pathrusim, Kasluhim (+ Philistines), Kaphtorim

Twelve Sons of Canaan

15-18 Sidon, Heth, Jebusite, Amorite, Girgashite, Hivite, 'Arkite, Sinite, Arvadite, Tsemarite, Hamathite, Canaanite

Narrative About the Borders of Canaan

¹⁹ From Sidon to Gerar to Gaza to Sodom and Gomorrah to Lasha

Conclusion

²⁰ These are the sons of Ham into their families, into their languages, in their lands, by their nations.

Sons of Shem

Introduction to Shem

²¹ Father of all the sons of Eber (= Hebrews)

Shem's Twelve Sons and Grandsons Until Peleg (=

22-25 Elam, Asshur, Arphachshad, Lud, Aram

Aram: Uz, Hul, Gether, Mash

Arphachshad: Shelah, Eber

Eber: Peleg and Joktan

Fourteen Descendants of Eber Through Joktan

26-30a Joktan: Almodad, Sheleph, Hazarmaveth, Yarach, Hadoram, Uzzal, Diqlah, 'Obal, Abimael, Sheba', Ophir, Havilah, Yobab

Narrative About the Dwelling Spots of Joktan's Offspring

³⁰ And their settlement extended from Mesha as you go toward Sephar, the hill country of the east.

Conclusion

³¹ "These are the sons of Shem into their families, into their languages, in their lands, into their nations.

Sons Divided

³² These are the families of the sons of Noah, in their generations, by their nations, and from these were separated the nations in the land after the flood.

Genesis 10:1-32. Translation and Literary Design by Tim Mackie for BibleProject Classroom: Noah to Abraham (2020).

Seventy Nations From Separating Brothers

Genesis 10:1-32 introduces all of the characters we will meet in the rest of the Hebrew Bible. In a way, this genealogy functions as a geo-ethnic map. Many of the names in this list are place names (Elam, Canaan, Assyria), or they are place names turned family names (Jebusites, Hittite).

If we were to draw this mental map, the following is one modern way of depicting the result.



Zerr, E.M. (1947). [Wixsite](#).

But geography is not the author's main concern in arranging and composing this genealogy. Noah's oracle in Genesis 9:25-27 has already anticipated the relations of these groups (see the notes for Session 23). But the total number of 70 and the arrangement of each set of descendants also communicates important theological claims.

"The peoples listed amount precisely to seventy, excluding Nimrod, who is an individual. There are fourteen Japhethites, thirty Hamites, and twenty-six Shemites. The figure seventy, even if not explicitly given, can hardly be fortuitous. The mere recognition in verse 5 of the existence of additional, unnamed 'maritime nations' lends added significance to the enumeration as being deliberately chosen. In the biblical world the number seventy is 'typological'; that is, it is used for rhetorical effect to evoke the idea of totality, of comprehensiveness on a large scale, as opposed to the use of seven on a smaller scale. Thus, according to [Genesis 46:27](#), the entire household of Jacob that went down to Egypt comprised seventy souls.

The representative body of the entire community of Israel in the wilderness consisted of seventy elders, as recorded in [Exodus 24:9](#) and [Numbers 11:24](#); and the prophet Ezekiel, in [8:11](#), uses the same figure at the end of the period of the monarchy. ... In light of this convention, one may safely assume that making the offspring of Noah's sons total seventy is a literary device to convey the notion of the totality of the human race. The same device is employed in rabbinic literature, where the phrases 'seventy peoples' or 'seventy languages' express humanity in its entirety. This device affords an insight into a major function of the Table, a document thus far unparalleled in the ancient world. This strangely perplexing miscellany of peoples, tribes, and places is no mere academic or scholastic exercise. It affirms, first of all, the common origin and absolute unity of humankind after the Flood. It also ... asserts that the varied ways that humans divide themselves are all secondary to the essential unity of the international community, which truly constitutes a family of man."

Adapted from Sarna, Nahum M. (2001). [Genesis, The JPS Torah Commentary](#). Jewish Publication Society. 69.

"Thus the Bible indicates the perfection of humanity by its numerical harmony, and it is not Scripture's intention to cite the names of all the peoples seriatim. Those who conclude a priori that our chapter purports to present a complete ethnic list, and as a result of this premise discover a number of omissions, since in truth the list is incomplete, have failed to understand the chapter properly. It explicitly declares that its aim is not to mention all the peoples. It states, for example, in v. 5 with regard to the sons of Japheth: From these spread the coastland peoples in their lands, each with his own language, by their families, in their nations, that means to say, that there were many other nations in the world who traced their descent to Japheth, but there was no need to detail their names. Similar expressions are subsequently used with reference to the sons of Ham (v. 20), the sons of Shem (v. 31), and the sons of Noah as a whole (v. 32). The Torah was concerned only to complete the number of seventy names, and to incorporate therein the names of the principal nations that were near to Israel, or were in some way connected with the Israelites, or were in some manner known to them."

Cassuto, Umberto (2012). [From Noah to Abraham: A Commentary on the Book of Genesis, Part Two](#). Varda Books. 179-180.

This genealogy also continues the narrator's focus on the divinely chosen line that will be the "seed of the woman" (Gen. 3:15). The author presents multiple narratives where a generation of brothers divide, usually as a result of human folly or sin. Out of this divide God selects one promised lineage, and it's at this point that we are given diverging genealogies.

Narrative of Division	Gen. 4	Gen. 9	Gen. 16-17, 21	Gen. 25-33	Gen. 37-45
Genealogy of the Non-Chosen	Cain to Lemek Gen. 4:17-26	Japheth, Ham Gen. 10:1-32	Ishmael, sons of Keturah	Esau Gen. 36	The 10 brothers/tribes
Genealogy of the Chosen Line	Abel/Seth Gen. 5:1-32	Shem Gen. 11:10-32	Isaac Gen. 25:19	Jacob Gen. 37:1	Joseph & Judah

Diverging Genealogies. Created by Tim Mackie for BibleProject Classroom: Noah to Abraham (2020).

“After the genealogy of the sons of Japheth, the oldest of the sons of Noah, the Bible gives us the pedigree of the sons of Ham, the third son, in order to leave to the end—as the climax—Shem, who, although the middle one in order of birth, was the most important of them, since he was the primogenitor of the people of Israel. The Torah first completes the genealogy of Japheth and Ham so as to dispose of the subject and avoid the need to revert to it later; whereas the account of Shem’s offspring, who are central to the narrative, will continue in the subsequent chapters. In accordance with this principle, the descendants of Ishmael are listed first (25:12-18), so that the Bible may proceed afterwards to the history of Isaac’s children, who are the more important (25:19 ff.); similarly the roll of Esau’s sons (chapter 36) precedes that of Jacob (37:2 ff.).”

Cassuto, Umberto (2012). [From Noah to Abraham: A Commentary on the Book of Genesis, Part Two](#). Varda Books. 198.

The Sons of Japheth

Sons of Japheth

Seven Sons” of Japeth

² Gomer, Magog, Madai, Yavan, Tubal, Meshek, Tiras

Seven “Grandsons” of Japheth

³⁻⁴ Gomer’s sons: Ashkenaz, Riphath, Togarmah
Yavan’s sons: Elishah, Tarshish, Kittim, Dodanim

Conclusion

⁵ From these separated the islands of the nations in their lands, each into their language, into their

families, by their nations.

Genesis 10:1-32. Translation and Literary Design by Tim Mackie for BibleProject Classroom: Noah to Abraham (2020).

The author has selected only two lists of Japheth's sons (Gomer and Yavan) that equal the number seven, thus matching the seven sons of Japheth as a whole. This shows the author's selectivity in reaching the number seven (שבע), which also means "to be full" or "complete" in Hebrew. The symbolic numbering communicates totality.

In the biblical imagination, these nations make up the distant regions ("the edges of the land") of the west. They represent an unknown and exotic realm of mainland and islands. In fact, sometimes these regions are simply called "the islands" (from Gen. 10:5; see [Ps. 72:10](#), [97:1](#); [Isa. 11:11](#), [24:15](#), [42:10](#), [51:5](#)).

When the biblical hope for the messianic Kingdom is portrayed, the "islands/coastlands" are often mentioned as a way to include the most distant regions of the land.

Psalm 72:8-11 NIV*

⁸ May [the seed of David] rule from sea to sea
and from the river to the ends of the earth.

⁹ May the desert tribes bow before him
and his enemies lick the dust.

¹⁰ May the kings of Tarshish and of the islands
bring tribute to him.

May the kings of Sheba and Seba
present him gifts.

¹¹ May all kings bow down to him
and all nations serve him.

*Key Words Adapted by Teacher

Isaiah 51:5 NASB*

My righteousness is near,
my salvation has gone forth,
and my arms will judge the peoples;
the islands will wait for me,
and for my arm they will wait expectantly.

*Key Words Adapted by Teacher

Isaiah 60:9 NIV

Surely the islands look to me; in the lead are the ships of Tarshish, bringing your children from afar, with their silver and gold, to the honor of the LORD your God, the Holy One of Israel, for he has endowed you with splendor.

Isaiah 66:18-19 NIV

¹⁸ And I ... am about to come and gather the people of all nations and languages, and they will come and see my glory. ¹⁹ I will set a sign among them, and I will send some of those who survive to the nations—to Tarshish, to the Libyans and Lydians ... to Tubal and Greece, and to the distant islands that have not heard of my fame or seen my glory. They will proclaim my glory among the nations.

Zephaniah 2:11 NASB*

The LORD will be terrifying to them, for he will destroy all the gods of the earth; and all the islands of the nations will bow down to him, everyone from his own place.

*Key Words Adapted by Teacher

Conversely, these are also the nations that will rally around “Gog of Magog” in [Ezekiel 38-39](#).

The Sons of Ham

Sons of Ham

Four Sons of Ham

⁶ Cush, Egypt, Put, Canaan

Seven Sons and Grandsons of Cush

⁷ Cush: Seba, Havilah, Sabtah, Ra’amah, Sabtekah
Ra’amah: Sheba, Dedan

Narrative About Nimrod Building Babylon and Nineveh

⁸⁻⁹ Cush bore Nimrod (נמרד • *we will rebel*), he began (החל) to be a mighty warrior (גבור) in the land. He was a mighty warrior hunter (גבור ציד) before Yahweh, therefore it is said, “Like Nimrod, a mighty warrior hunter (גבור) before Yahweh.”

¹⁰ The beginning of his kingdom (ממלכתו) was Babylon ... in the land of Shinar

¹¹⁻¹² From that land he (= Nimrod) went out to Assyria and Asshur built (בנה) Nineveh ... that is the great city (העיר הגדולה)

Seven Sons of Egypt + the Philistines

¹³⁻¹⁴ Ludim, ‘Anamim, Lehabim, Naphtuhim, Pathrusim, Kasluhim (+ Philistines), Kaphtorim

Twelve Sons of Canaan

¹⁵⁻¹⁸ Sidon, Heth, Jebusite, Amorite, Girgashite, Hivite, ‘Arkite, Sinite, Arvadite, Tseamarite, Hamathite, Canaanite

Narrative About the Borders of Canaan

¹⁹ From Sidon to Gerar to Gaza to Sodom and Gomorrah to Lasha

Conclusion

20 These are the sons of Ham into their families, into their languages, in their lands, by their nations.

Genesis 10:1-32. Translation and Literary Design by Tim Mackie for BibleProject Classroom: Noah to Abraham (2020).

The list of Ham's sons has the same design intentions as the list of Japheth's sons in 10:2-5.

- The author has chosen the firstborn son (Cush) for a list of five sons, but then chooses the fourth son of Cush to list his two sons, thus coming to total of seven.
- The seven sons of Egypt/Mizraim are listed, as these are all people associated with the Egyptian tribes of the southwest.
- The twelve sons of Canaan are surely a symbolic match to the twelve sons of Jacob, who will become the twelve tribes who will dispossess the twelve tribes of Canaan.

In this way, the narrator hints that just as Cain's own murderous act was magnified by his descendant Lemek, so also will Ham's shameful act be magnified by his descendent Canaan. And, of course, this is what Leviticus 18 and 20 make crystal clear.

The Narrative of Nimrod

Into the genealogical list of Canaan's son Cush, the author has inserted a narrative about the sixth son of Cush whose name was not listed in the genealogy. We are told all kinds of seemingly random bits of information about Nimrod, but the significance of every line is clear when we follow the hyperlinks to other texts in Genesis 1-11.

Genesis 10:8-12: Narrative Insert Into the Genealogy of Ham	Hyperlinks Within Genesis 1-11
10:8-9: Cush bore Nimrod [נמרד = "we will rebel"], he began (החל) to be a mighty warrior (גבור) in the land. He was a mighty warrior hunter (גבר-ציד) before Yahweh, therefore it is said, "Like Nimrod, a mighty warrior hunter (גבר-ציד) before Yahweh.	Gen 6:1 "It came about when humanity began (החל) to multiply ..." Gen 6:4 "The Nephilim were in the land in the those days, and also afterwards, when the sons of God went into the daughters of humanity, and they bore for them the mighty warriors (גבור) who were from ancient time, men of the name (שם)
10:10 The beginning of his kingdom (ממלכתו) was Babylon ... in the land of Shinar	11:2 "And when [all the land] set out from the east, they found a plain in the land of Shinar .
10:11 "from that land he [= Nimrod] went out to Assyria and Asshur built (בנה) Nineveh ... that is the	4:17-18: And Cain built (בנה + עיר) a city and called it the name [שם] of his son, Enoch ... Methushael
Nimrod and Hyperlinks to Genesis 1-11. Created by Tim Mackie for BibleProject Classroom: Noah to Abraham (2020).	

Genesis 10:8-12: Narrative Insert Into the Genealogy of Ham	Hyperlinks Within Genesis 1-11
great city (העיר הגדולה)	bore Lemek (למך) 11:4 “Let us build for ourselves a city (בנה + עיר) ... therefore they called its name (שם), Babylon. Jonah 1:2 Go to Nineveh, the great city (העיר הגדולה)
Nimrod and Hyperlinks to Genesis 1-11. Created by Tim Mackie for BibleProject Classroom: Noah to Abraham (2020).	

In this narrative, a son of Ham named “we will rebel” is a violent warrior-hunter who builds both Babylon and Assyria’s capital city of Nineveh. Every part of this description is loaded with meaning and paints a larger-than-life portrait of Nimrod and the city-kingdoms that he represents.

The quest for a specific historical king of Mesopotamia has been unsuccessful and disputed, much like the search for the exact pharaohs referred to in Exodus 1-15. The biblical authors have deliberately blurred the portrait so that these imperial kings become narrative icons separate from their historical referent.

“The biblical Nimrod, then, is not a total counterpart of any one historical character. He is rather a composite Hebrew equivalent of the kings of the Sargon dynasty [in Mesopotamia of the late 2000’s B.C.E.]: the first mighty king to rule after the flood.”

Levin, Yigal (2002). “Nimrod the Mighty, King of Kish, King of Sumer and Akkad.” *Vetus Testamentum*, 52 (3). 350-366.

“Mighty Warrior-Hunter”

The word “mighty warrior” (Heb. *gibbor* / גבור) appears once before to describe the offspring of the sons of God and the human daughters. The early Jewish understanding of Nimrod as a giant (the Septuagint translated *gibbor* as *gigas* / γίγας) is also significant.

Let’s take a look at the important parallel alignment of Lemek and Nimrod in the literary design of Genesis 1-11.

Parallel	Genesis 1-6	Genesis 6-12
1st Generation	Adam and Eve	Noah
2nd Generation	Cain	Ham
3rd Generation	Lemek	Nimrod
Lemek and Nimrod. Created by Tim Mackie for BibleProject Classroom: Noah to Abraham (2020).		

Parallel	Genesis 1-6	Genesis 6-12
Cosmic Rebellion	Genesis 6	Babylon
Divine Justice	the flood	the scattering
Seed of the Woman Remnant	Noah	Abraham
<i>Lemek and Nimrod. Created by Tim Mackie for BibleProject Classroom: Noah to Abraham (2020).</i>		

The Borders of Canaan

The biblical author includes a short description of the boundaries of the land of Canaan. This shows us the author's intends the list to anticipate Abraham and his descendants, who will be promised possession of this very land (Gen. 12:6, 15:7-21).

Genesis 10:18b-19 Instructor's Translation

¹⁸ And afterward, the families of the Canaanite were scattered. ¹⁹ And the border of the Canaanite was from Sidon as you go toward Gerar, as far as Gaza; as you go toward Sodom and Gomorrah and Admah and Zeboiim, as far as Lasha.

The Sons of Shem

Genesis 10:21 Instructor's Translation

Now, to Shem also children were born, he is the father of all the children of Eber/Hebrew, the brother of Japheth, the older one.

Introduction to Shem: Father of all the sons of Eber (= Hebrews)

Sons of Shem

Introduction to Shem

²¹ Father of all the sons of Eber (= Hebrews)

Shem's Twelve Sons and Grandsons Until Peleg (=

²²⁻²⁵ Elam, Asshur, Arphachshad, Lud, Aram

Aram: Uz, Hul, Gether, Mash

Arphachshad: Shelah, Eber

Eber: Peleg and Joktan

Fourteen Descendants of Eber Through Joktan

26-30a Joktan: Almodad, Sheleph, Hazarmaveth, Yarach, Hadoram, Uzzal, Diqlah, ‘Obal, Abimael, Sheba’, Ophir, Havilah, Yobab

Narrative About the Dwelling Spots of Joktan’s Offspring

30 And their settlement extended from Mesha as you go toward Sephar, the hill country of the east.

Conclusion

31 “These are the sons of Shem into their families, into their languages, in their lands, into their nations.

Genesis 10:1-32. Translation and Literary Design by Tim Mackie for BibleProject Classroom: Noah to Abraham (2020).

The line of Shem as a whole doesn’t lead to Abram. An important division takes place in Genesis 10:25.

Genesis 10:25 Instructor’s Translation

Now, to Eber, two sons were born,
the name of the one was Peleg (פלג),
for in his days the earth was divided (נפלג);
and his brother’s name was Joktan.

The genealogy of Shem splits off in two directions, creating a division between the brothers, just as in the previous narratives when the land was divided. This follows the same scheme that we saw earlier in the parallel design of Genesis 1-6 and 6-11.

Adam & Eve’s Line	Ham’s Line	Shem’s Line
Adam and Eve	1st generation: Noah	1st generation: Shem
Split between Cain and Abel/Seth	Split between Shem, Ham, Japheth	Split between Peleg and Joktan
Cain’s line leads to cosmic rebellion and the flood	Ham’s line leads to cosmic rebellion and the scattering	Shem’s line splits during a cosmic rebellion and division

Family Line Parallel Design . Created by Tim Mackie for BibleProject Classroom: Adam to Noah (2020).

"It is significant that another genealogy of Shem is repeated after the account of the building of Babylon (11:1-9), and there the line is continued to Abraham through the first son of Eber, Peleg (11:10-26). In arranging the genealogy of Shem in this way, the author draws a dividing line through the descendants of Shem on either side of the city of Babylon. The dividing line falls between the two sons of Eber, that is, Peleg and Joktan. One line leads to the building of Babylon and the other to the family of Abraham. The author supplies a hint to this division of the line of Shem with the comment that in Peleg's day "the land was divided" (10:25). As throughout the biblical text, the "land" is often a reference to the "inhabitants of the land." Thus, not only is the land divided in the confusion of languages (11:1), but more fundamentally, two great lines of humanity diverge from the midst of the sons of Shem. Those who seek to make a name (11:4) for themselves in the building of Babylon and those for whom God will make a name (12:2) in the call of Abraham."

Sailhamer, John H. (1995). [*The Pentateuch as Narrative: A Biblical-theological Commentary*](#). Zondervan Academic.

Reflection Question

Does the curse on Canaan mean all Canaanites are bound to a certain fate?

Session 26: The Brothers Come Together in Peace

Key Takeaways

- When the prophets share their vision of future hope in God's Kingdom, they paint a picture of all nations drawn together in peace.
- Paul's missionary journeys are about wanting to see the nations of Japheth welcomed into the tents of Shem.



This session has no other notes

Reflection Question

What is the connection between Genesis 10 and Paul's missionary journeys?

Session 27: The Founding of Babylon

Key Takeaways

- The building of the tower links thematically to the rejection of God's provision and deliverance.
- Acts plays out a revision and reversal of the scattering at the tower of Babylon.

The Founding of Babylon: Translation and Literary Design of Genesis 11:1-9

¹ Now **all the land** was
one language
and unified words

² and it came about as they journeyed east,
that they found a plain in the land of **Shinar**
and they settled there.

Babylon's Two Speeches

³ **And they said** each to **his neighbor** ,
“ **Come** , let us brick bricks and burn them as burnt.”
and for them, the brick was like stone,
and tar was for them like mortar.

⁴ **And they said** ,
“ **Come** , let us **build for ourselves a city** ,
and **a tower** whose head is in the skies,
and let us **make for ourselves a name** ,
lest we be scattered upon the face of all the land.”

Yahweh “Comes Down”

⁵ **And Yahweh came down** to see **the city and the tower**
that the sons of humanity **built** .

Yahweh's Two Statements

6 **And Yahweh said** ,
 a “ **Behold** , **one people** ,
 a' and **one language** for all of them
 b and this they have begun to do,
 c and now, nothing will be inaccessible for them,
 b' anything that they devise to do.
 7 **Come** , let us go down
 and **let us make-babble of** **their language** there,
 so that each one will not hear the **language** of **his neighbor** .”

a 8 And Yahweh **scattered them from there upon the face of** **all the land** ,
 b and they stopped **building** the **city** .
 b' 9 Therefore, its **name** was called **Babylon** ,
 b' because there Yahweh **made-babble of** **the language of** **all the land** ,
 a' and from there Yahweh **scattered them upon the face of** **all the land** .

Genesis 11:1-9. Translation and Literary Design by Tim Mackie for BibleProject Classroom: Noah to Abraham (2020).

Features of This Literary Design

- The opening and closing scenes focus on the location and language of this endeavor. Shinar/Babylon are juxtaposed, while the unified language is contrasted with the confused languages at the conclusion.
- The double speech panel of the Babylonians (vv. 3-4) is matched by the double speech of Yahweh (vv. 6-7). Their initiative begins with a joint endeavor between neighbors (v. 3) and leads to the construction of a city for their own name, along with a tower that elevates them to the realm of the gods (v. 4). Yahweh’s speech addresses each of these in reverse: first their aspirations (v. 6), and then their language that makes this “neighborly” endeavor possible (v. 7).
- At the center of the unit is Yahweh’s “descent” to investigate the city and tower.

Babylon, Eden’s Exile, and Cain’s City

The founding of Babylon is filled with hyperlinks back to the story of humanity’s exile from Eden and to the building of Cain’s city.

Eden

Genesis 3:22-23 NASB*

22 And Yahweh Elohim said, “**Behold** (הן), the human has become **like one of us**, knowing good and bad, **and now** (ועתה), so that he doesn’t stretch out his hand, and take also from the tree of life, and eat, and live forever.”

23 And **Yahweh God sent him out** from the garden of Eden, to cultivate the ground from which he was taken.

*Key Words Adapted by Teacher

Genesis 3:24 NASB*

And [Yahweh] banished the human and he stationed **from the east** of the garden of Eden cherubim and the flaming sword

*Key Words Adapted by Teacher

Babylon

Genesis 11:6-8 NASB*

⁶ And Yahweh said, “**Behold** (הִנֵּה), they are one people, and they all have the same language, and this is what they began to do, **and now** (וְעַתָּה) nothing they purpose to do will be impossible for them.

⁷ Come, **let us go down** and there confuse their language so that they will not understand one another’s speech.”

⁸ And **Yahweh scattered them abroad** from there over the face of the whole earth, and they stopped building the city.

*Key Words Adapted by Teacher

Genesis 11:2 NASB*

And it came about as they journeyed **from the east** ...

*Key Words Adapted by Teacher

Babylon is also thematically linked to Cain’s city in Genesis 4:17 and Nimrod’s city in Genesis 10:8-10.

City	Reference	Connections
Cain’s City	4:17 And Cain knew his wife and she conceived, and gave birth to Enoch; and he built a city , and called the name of the city Enoch, according to the name of his son.	• Cain builds a city for self-protection after exile from the high Eden land • He names the city after his own family lineage
Nimrod’s City	10:8 Now, Cush became the father of Nimrod; he began to be a mighty warrior in the land. ⁹ He was a mighty warrior-hunter before Yahweh; therefore it is said, “ Like Nimrod a mighty warrior-hunter	• Nimrod’s name is praised and repeated • His kingdom begins in Babylon and Shinar • He builds Nineveh, a great city

Babylon Cities. Created by Tim Mackie for BibleProject Classroom: Noah to Abraham (2020).

City	Reference	Connections
	before Yahweh.” ¹⁰ And the beginning of his kingdom was Babylon and Erech and Accad and Calneh, in the land of Shinar . ¹¹ From that land he went forth into Assyria, and he built Nineveh and Rehoboth-Ir and Calah, ¹² and Resen between Nineveh and Calah; that is the great city .	
Babylon's City	11:4 and they said, “Come, let us build for ourselves a city , and a tower whose head will be in the skies, and let us make for ourselves a name , lest we be scattered upon the face of all the land.” ⁹ Therefore its name was called Babylon	• Babylonians build a city • They seek to elevate their name

Babylon Cities. Created by Tim Mackie for BibleProject Classroom: Noah to Abraham (2020).

All the Land Had “One Language”

The phrase “all the land” is a reference back to the offspring of the sons of Noah in Genesis 9:19.

Genesis 9:18-19 NASB*

¹⁸ Now the sons of Noah who came out of the ark were Shem and Ham and Japheth; and Ham was the father of Canaan. ¹⁹ These three were the sons of Noah, and from these **all the land was scattered**.

*Key Words Adapted by Teacher

“One language” (Heb. *saphah* ‘ekhat) and “unified words” (Heb. *devarim* ‘ekhadim)

“Unified” (אחדים) is the plural of the word “one” (אחד). It can be used to mean “few” when applied to a small group of something (a “few days” as in Gen. 27:44, 29:20; Dan. 11:20). But when it describes multiple things becoming one, it means unified.

Ezekiel 37:16-17 NASB*

¹⁶ And you, son of man, take for yourself **one** stick and write on it, "For Judah and for the sons of Israel, his companions." Then take **one** stick and write on it, "For Joseph, the stick of Ephraim and all the house of Israel, his companions." ¹⁷ Then join them for yourself **one** to **one** into **one** stick, that they may become **unified** (אחדים) in your hand.

*Key Words Adapted by Teacher

This example from Ezekiel illuminates what it means that "all the land" (i.e., the descendants of Noah's three sons) has "one lip and unified words."

From One Language to Many

In Genesis 10, we learn that each regional network of families from Noah's sons has their own clans and languages and lands and nations.

Genesis 10:5 NASB*

From these the coastlands of the nations were separated into their lands, each according to his language (lit. "tongue" / לשון), according to their families, into their nations.

*Key Words Adapted by Teacher

Genesis 10:20 NASB

These are the sons of Ham, according to their families, according to their languages (lit. "tongues" / לשון), by their lands, by their nations.

Genesis 10:31 NASB

These are the sons of Shem, according to their families, according to their languages (lit. "tongues" / לשון), by their lands, according to their nations.

But Genesis 11:1 begins by telling us that "all the land had one language (lit. "lip" / שפה) and unified words." How do these two details work together?

It's most likely that Genesis 10 and 11:1-9 are deliberately arranged in non-chronological order.

"The best explanation is that these materials have been intentionally dischronologized in order to arrange them thematically. The purpose of the arrangement is to highlight a 'spread of sin, spread of grace' theme throughout Genesis 1-11, which in turn is part of a larger creation-uncreation-recreation theme of the Pentateuch. The Table of Nations in its current location fulfills the divine command to 'be fruitful and multiply, and fill the earth' (9:1, reflecting also 1:28), and is therefore predominantly a positive appraisal of human dispersion. The sons of Noah were fulfilling their purpose by bringing God's blessing to fruition. Had it been placed after 11:1-9 the Table of Nations in Genesis 10 would of necessity be transformed into a sign of God's judgment. As these two units stand, the division of humanity and the multiplicity of languages are evaluated both positively (Gen. 10) and negatively (Gen. 11)."

Arnold, Bill (2008). [*Genesis \(New Cambridge Bible Commentary\)*](#). Cambridge University Press. 118.

The later portrayal of Babylon in Daniel is seen as a rebellious reversal attempt to yet again unify the many peoples and languages in allegiance to divine Babylon. Daniel 1-3 draws upon Genesis 11:1-9 in many deliberate ways.

Genesis 11:2: “They settled in the plain (בקעה) of Shinar (שנער)”

- Daniel 1:2: Nebuchadnezzar plunders the Jerusalem temple and the royal seed of Judah and takes them to the “land of Shinar” (שנער).
- Daniel 2: Nebuchadnezzar dreams about an imperial image with a head of gold.
- Daniel 3:1: Nebuchadnezzar builds an image “in the plain (בקעה) of Dura.”

Genesis 11:1: “One language and unified words”

- Daniel 3:4: “To you the command is given, O peoples, nations, and languages” (cf. the clans, lands, languages, nations, of Gen. 10:5, 20, 31).

The Division of Languages in Ancient Cultural Context

Also important is the work of Samuel N. Kramer (“The ‘Babel of Tongues’: A Sumerian Version”), who noted an ancient Sumerian work called *Enmarker and the Lord of Aratta* (Kramer, 1968).

In those days,
there being no snakes,
there being no scorpions,
there being no hyenas,
there being no lions,
there being no dogs or wolves,
there being no (thing) fearful or hair-raising,
mankind had no opponents—

in those days ...
bilingual Sumer
being the great country
of princely office ...
(in) the (whole) compass
of heaven and earth
the people entrusted (to him)
could address Enlil,
verily, in but a single tongue.

In those days,
(having) periods of power,
princely and royal periods of power —
(did) Enki ... fight,
(150) did Enki, lord of abundance,
lord of effective command,
did the lord of intelligence,
the country's clever one ...
lord of Eridu
estrangle the tongues
in their mouths
as many as were put there.
The tongues of men
which were one.

Enmarker and the Lord of Aratta quoted in Hallo, William W. and Younger, K. Lawson (1997). [*The Context of Scripture, Volume 1: Canonical Compositions from the Biblical World*](#). Brill Academic Publishers. 547-548.

“On Kramer’s interpretation, the OT is offering an alternative explanation of the diversity of languages. Genesis is affirming that the diversity of languages represents a divine judgment on mankind and is not the product of rivalry between the gods Enlil and Enki. Here, as in the flood story, Genesis explains things in terms of a moral monotheism, whereas Mesopotamia saw things in terms of polytheistic competitiveness.”

Wenham, Gordon J. (1987). [*Word Biblical Commentary, Vol. 1: Genesis 1-15*](#). Thomas Nelson. 237.

Babylon, Egypt, and Ancient Empire

The portrait of Babylon making a name for themselves through an ascent to the heavens becomes an icon of humanity's rebellion. Babylon is the first imperial rebel, and they set the pattern for later empires who will follow in the same footsteps.

In the book of Exodus, Egypt is set on analogy to Babylon through a sophisticated use of hyperlinks.

Plan and Response	Babylon in Genesis 11:3-4	Egypt in Exodus 1:10-11, 14
Humans concoct dastardly plans	³ They said to each other, “Come (הבה)”, let’s make bricks and bake them thoroughly.” They used brick (לבנה) instead of stone, and tar for mortar (חמר). ⁴ Then they said, “Come (הבה), let us build ourselves a city, with a tower that reaches to the heavens, so that we may make a name for ourselves, or else (פן) we will be scattered abroad over the face of the whole earth.”	¹⁰ Pharaoh said to his people, “Come (הבה), let us deal wisely with them, or else (פן) they will multiply and in the event of war, they will also join themselves to those who hate us, and fight against us and go up out of the land.” ¹¹ So they appointed taskmasters over them to afflict them with hard labor. And they built for Pharaoh storage cities, Pithom and Raamses ... ¹⁴ And they made their lives bitter with hard labor in mortar (חמר) and brick (לבנה) and at all kinds of labor in the field, all their labors which they rigorously imposed on them.
Yahweh turns evil plan back on itself	11:8 So Yahweh scattered them abroad from there over the face of the whole earth; and they stopped building the city.	13:18 And the people of Israel went up out of the land of Egypt equipped for battle. 14:25 And the Egyptians said, “Let us flee from before Israel, for Yahweh is fighting for them against the Egyptians.”
<i>Egypt is Set on Analogy to Babylon.</i> Created by Tim Mackie for BibleProject Classroom: Noah to Abraham (2020).		

"In a polemical vein, [the biblical author] named the Babylonian claim an instance of hubris and filed it in the incrementally growing catalog kept since the beginning of history. Babel is the apex of arrogance. It involves the harnessing of all humanity for a single purpose devised by a totalitarian regime, with all the means it can muster. [Genesis 11 contains] an intrinsic textual scorn for the robotization of the Babylonians. They share not only one language but also uniform concepts. All the energies are mobilized for the construction of monuments to their own glory ... This and the likeness of the material used in Babylon and by the Pharaohs for the erection of pyramids ... bring the Bible to condemn equally the Babylonian and Egyptian megalomania. As a symbol of this, the tower plays a major role."

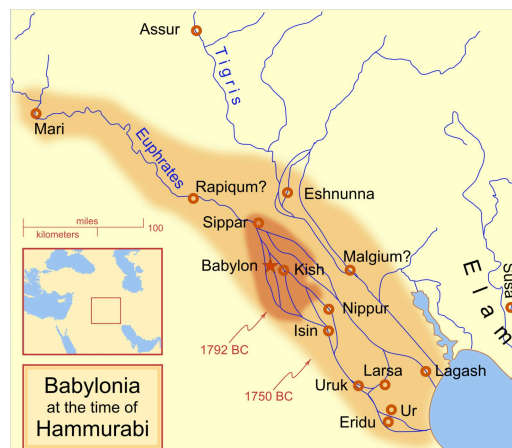
LaCocque, Andre (2010). [*The Captivity of Innocence: Babel and the Yahwist*](#). Wipf and Stock. 17, 19.

"In the late third millennium the ziggurat was developed by creating a succession of massive platforms on top of which a small shrine was located. This ziggurat was situated either adjacent to the main temple, or at a distance, but then connected to the temple by a succession of courtyards. It towered over the rest of the city, and must have presented an impressive sight, considering that the authors of the Biblical book of Genesis saw in Babylon's ziggurat a prime example of man's hubris."

Van De Mieroop, Marc (1999). [*The Ancient Mesopotamian City*](#). Oxford University Press. 77.

The Tower of Babylon in Ancient Near Eastern Perspective

Babylon's long early period (*Bab-il* = "gate of the gods" in Akkadian) culminated in the reign of Hammurabi (1795-1750 B.C.E.), who unified the entire Mesopotamian region under Babylon's rule. His reign was followed by a long decline until the Hittite uprising in 1595 B.C.E. It was nearly 1,000 years later that Nebuchadnezzar led the Neo-Babylonian empire to its resurgence in the late 600s B.C.E., which lasted less than a century because it fell to the Persians in 539 B.C.E.

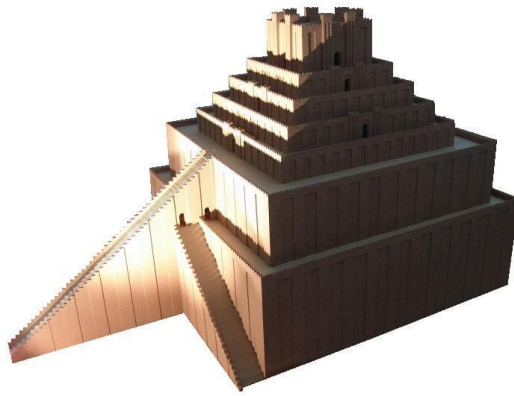


Map Master (2008). [Wikipedia](#)

The plains of Shinar refer to the huge river deltas of the Tigris and Euphrates which merge together before running into the Persian Gulf.

The great Etemenanki Ziggurat in Babylon, and the accompanying Esagila temple, was one of the largest temple structures in the ancient world. It was built, remodeled, and rebuilt several times within the 700 years

between the 14th and 7th century B.C.E.



Mustafin, O. (2006) [Wikipedia Commons](#)

Etemenanki is Sumerian for “tower of the foundation of Heaven and Earth.” Its 14th century origins are mentioned in the famous Babylonian epic of creation, Enuma Elish, which tells of Marduk’s rise to power as the old Babylonian empire came to dominate Mesopotamia in the 1200s B.C.E.

Enuma Elish

"The Anunna-gods, of heaven and earth, made ready to speak,
To Marduk their lord they said,
"Now, Lord, you who have liberated us,
(50) What courtesy may we do you?

**We will make a shrine, whose name will be a famous saying,
Your chamber that shall be our stopping place, we shall find rest therein ..."**

(55) When Marduk heard this,
His features glowed brightly, like the day,
"Then make Babylon the task that you requested,
Let its brickwork be formed, build high the shrine."

The Anunna-gods set to with hoes,

(60) One (full) year **they made its bricks**.

When the second year came, They raised up Esagila, the counterpart to the deep-waters,
They built **the high ziggurat ...**

For Anu-Enlil-Ea they founded his ... and dwelling.

(65) Majestically he took his seat before them,
Its pinnacles were facing toward the base of Esharra ...

(70) The Lord, on the Exalted Dais, which **they built as his dwelling**,

Seated the gods his fathers for a banquet,

"This is Babylon, your place of dwelling.

Take your pleasure there, seat yourselves in its delights!"

The great gods sat down,

(75) They set out cups, they sat down at the feast."

After they had taken their enjoyment inside it,
And in awe-inspiring Esagila had conducted the offering,
All the orders and designs had been made permanent,
All the gods had divided the stations of heaven and netherworld,
(80) The fifty great gods took their thrones,
The seven gods of destinies were confirmed forever for rendering judgment ...

After Anu had ordained the destinies of the bow,
He set out the royal throne which stood highest among the gods,
Anu had him sit there, in the assembly of the gods.
(95) Then the great gods convened,
They made Marduk's destiny highest, they prostrated themselves ...

They granted him exercise of kingship over the gods,
(100) They established him forever for lordship of heaven and earth.

Enuma Elish, Tablet 6. Quoted in Hallo, William W. and Younger, K. Lawson (2002). *The Context of Scripture: Volume 1 Canonical Compositions from the Biblical World*. Brill Academic Publishers. 401.



DKFindOut (2023) [Joel Edmund Anderson](#)

The temple and ziggurat were restored under the reign of Nabopolassar of the Neo-Babylonian empire in the 600s B.C.E. A cylindrical clay monument describes the remodel.

“At that time my lord Marduk told me in regard to Etemenanki, **the ziqqurraṭ of Babylon, to ground its foundation in the lap of the underworld, to make its summit like the heavens.** I fashioned pick-axes, spades and brick-moulds ... and set them in the hands of a vast workforce enlisted from my land. **I had them shape mud bricks without number and mould baked bricks like countless raindrops. I had the River Arakhtu bear asphalt and bitumen like a mighty flood ...**

Through the sagacity of Ea, through the intelligence of Marduk, through the wisdom of Nabû and Nissaba, by means of the vast mind that the god who created me let me possess, I deliberated with my great intellect, I commissioned the wisest experts ... The master-builders drew taut the measuring cords, they determined the limits. I sought confirmation by consulting Shamash, Adad and Marduk and, whenever my mind deliberated (and) I pondered (unsure of) the dimensions, the great gods made (the truth) known to me by the procedure of (oracular) confirmation ...

I constructed the building ... and **raised its top as high as a mountain.** For my lord Marduk I made it an object fitting for wonder, just as it was in former times.”

Nabopolassar Cylinder A, 1.30-3.37, Translation by George, A. R. (2005). *The Tower of Babel: Archaeology, History and Cuneiform Texts*. Archiv Für Orientforschung. 51, 75-95.

"The best indication of the function of the ziggurats comes from the names given to them. For instance, the name of the ziggurat at Babylon, Etemenanki, means 'temple of the foundation of heaven and earth.' One at Larsa means 'temple which links heaven and earth.' Most significant is the name of the ziggurat at Sippar, 'temple of the stairway to pure heaven' ... This stairway was a visual representation of that which was believed to be used by the gods to travel from one realm to another. It was solely for the convenience of the gods and was maintained in order to provide the deity with the amenities that would refresh him along the way ... At the top of the ziggurat was the gate of the gods, the entrance into their heavenly abode. At the bottom was the temple, where hopefully the god would descend to receive the gifts and worship of his people. A similar mentality concerning location can be seen among the settlers of the American West, who picked up their towns and moved them into proximity with the newly laid railroad tracks, then erected a train station so that the train would stop there and bring economic benefits. In summary, the Tower of Babel project is a temple complex featuring a ziggurat, which was designed to make it convenient for the god to come down to his temple, receive worship from the people, and bless them."

Walton, John H. (2001). [*Genesis: The NIV Application Commentary*](#). Zondervan Academic. 374.

"The tower of Babel story is ... a spoof on ancient beliefs about the Mecca of Mesopotamia, the Esagil. The temple of Marduk in Babylon was supposed to have been built by the ... gods with specially prepared bricks. Its name, 'house with the uplifted head,' reflects its claim to have reached the heavens. But Genesis unmercifully batters these claims ... As for its vaunted height, so far short of heaven did this so-called skyscraper fall that God could hardly see it: he had to come down to look at it! But though man's highest achievement was pathetic in God's eyes, the motives that prompted his efforts were horrific. The desire to displace God from heaven, to make a name for oneself rather than allow God to do this, and to scheme without reference to his declared will, prompts one final judgment that will hobble man's attempts at cooperate rebellion once and for all ... The name 'Babel/Babylon' does not mean 'gate of the god,' as the Babylonians held, but 'confusion,' and it evokes the similar sounding words 'folly' (*nabal*) and 'flood' (*mabul*). Far from being the last word in human culture, it is the ultimate symbol of man's failure when he attempts to go it alone in defiance of his creator."

Wenham, Gordon J. (1987). [*Word Biblical Commentary, Vol. 1: Genesis 1-15*](#). Thomas Nelson. 172-173.

"Babel as a name solicits our attention ... for it means 'the gate of the divine' ... This empire's ultimate achievement is a tower, a rigid monument erected upwards as a channel of communication with the divine, with a guaranteed stability and permanence. From an Israelite perspective, the tower is an assault on the divine, because it is linked with a religious illusion. God is not reached by any human construct; he comes down by choice and establishes relations by covenanting with people. He is not the God of Etemenanki, but of Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob."

LaCocque, Andre (2010). [*The Captivity of Innocence: Babel and the Yahwist*](#). Wipf and Stock. 14.

Reversal of Babylon in the Prophets

The prophet Zephaniah hopes that one day Babylon will be reversed and Yahweh's justice will result in restoration and renewal for all nations.

[Zephaniah 3:8-9](#) is the hinge.

- Yahweh's justice is a purification process (3:9) to unify the nations in worship of the one true God (cf. 2:11) as a reversal of Genesis 11.
- Jerusalem and its remnant will be restored (3:10-20).

Zephaniah 3:8 NRSV*

For my decision (משפט) is to gather (קבץ) the nations, to assemble kingdoms, to pour out on them my wrath (זעם), all the heat of my anger (חרון אפי)

*Key Words Adapted by Teacher

This verse is hyperlinked to Joel 3:2 and Nahum 1:6

Joel 3:2 NASB*

I will gather (קבץ) all nations ... and enter into judgment (משפט) with them

*Key Words Adapted by Teacher

Nahum 1:6 NRSV*

Before his wrath (זעם), who can stand?
And who can arise in the heat of his anger (חרון אפיו)?

*Key Words Adapted by Teacher

Zephaniah 3:9-10 NASB*

For then I will transform/turn over for peoples
a pure lip (שפה + ברר),
so that all of them can call upon the name of Yahweh (קרא בשם יהוה)
to serve him with one (אחד) shoulder;
from across the rivers of Cush,
my worshippers (עתרי),
the daughter of my scattering (פוז),
they will carry (יבל) my offering.

*Key Words Adapted by Teacher

This verse is hyperlinked to Genesis 11:1, 6-7, 9; and Isaiah 18:1, 7

Genesis 11:1, 6-7, 9 Instructor's Translation

¹And all the land had one lip (שפה אחד) ... ⁶“Behold, they are one people (עם אחד), with one lip (שפה אחת) ...
⁷ come, let us confuse their lip (שפה + בלל) ... so Yahweh scattered (פוז) them ... therefore its name is called
Babylon (בבל), for there Yahweh confused the lip (בלל שפה) of all the land.

Isaiah 18:1, 7 Instructor's Translation

¹... from across the rivers of Cush ... ⁷ a people tall and dark will carry (יבל) tribute to Yahweh

"Zephaniah 3:8-10 combines multiple themes. The violent face divine justice, not to destroy them, but to purify them, so that they can be reconciled to Yahweh (see Joel 3 and Nahum 1). This theme is combined with the restoration of Jerusalem, which is viewed as an 'anti-Babylon.' By alluding to Genesis 11:1-9 and the story of the tower of Babel, Zephaniah 3:9-10 portrays the restoration of Zion as the undoing of the human dispersion. Rather than the tower of Babylon, Jerusalem operates as the center of a new humanity unified in worship of Yahweh with a purified language."

Nogalski, J. (2013). "Zephaniah's Use of Genesis 1-11." *Hebrew Bible and Ancient Israel*, 2 (3). 351-372.

Reflection Question

In Genesis, what does the building of cities represent? What are city builders trying to accomplish?

Session 28: From Shem to Abraham

Key Takeaways

- Out of the scattering judgment on Babylon, God brings the promise of a blessing for the whole Earth.
- Genesis 12 starts the cycle again, with Abraham and Sarah standing in as our new Adam and Eve.

From Shem to Abram: Translation and Literary Design of Genesis 11:10-26

Prologue

¹⁰ These are the generations of Shem.

First Generation

Shem was one hundred years old, and he caused the birth of Arpachshad two years after the flood;
¹¹ and Shem lived five hundred years after he caused the birth of Arpachshad,
and he caused the birth of sons and daughters.

Second Generation

¹² And Arpachshad lived thirty-five years, and he caused the birth of Shelah;
¹³ and Arpachshad lived four hundred and three years after he caused the birth of Shelah,
and he caused the birth of sons and daughters.

Third Generation

¹⁴ And Shelah lived thirty years, and he caused the birth of of Eber;
¹⁵ and Shelah lived four hundred and three years after he caused the birth of Eber,
and he caused the birth of sons and daughters.

Fourth Generation

¹⁶ And Eber lived thirty-four years, and he caused the birth of Peleg;
¹⁷ and Eber lived four hundred and thirty years after he caused the birth of Peleg,

and he caused the birth of sons and daughters.

Fifth Generation

¹⁸ And Peleg lived thirty years, and he caused the birth of Reu;

¹⁹ and Peleg lived two hundred and nine years after he caused the birth of Reu,
and he caused the birth of sons and daughters.

Sixth Generation

²⁰ And Reu lived thirty-two years, and he caused the birth of Serug;

²¹ and Reu lived two hundred and seven years after he became the father of Serug,
and he had other sons and daughters.

Seventh Generation

²² And Serug lived thirty years, and he caused the birth of of Nahor;

²³ and Serug lived two hundred years after he caused the birth of of Nahor,
and he caused the birth of sons and daughters.

Eighth Generation

²⁴ And Nahor lived twenty-nine years, and he caused the birth of Terah;

²⁵ and Nahor lived one hundred and nineteen years after he caused the birth of Terah,
and he caused the birth of sons and daughters.

Ninth Generation

²⁶ And Terah lived seventy years,

Tenth Generation

and he caused the birth of of Abram, Nahor and Haran.

Genesis 11:10-26. Translation and Literary Design by Tim Mackie for BibleProject Classroom: Noah to Abraham (2020).

This genealogy in Genesis 11:10-26 is recursive because it backtracks to Shem to restart his line, from 10:21-31, which had split at Peleg and Joktan in the fifth generation. This genealogy provides a frame around the rebellion of Babylon and the scattering narrative. However, its literary form also imitates the ten-generation genealogy from Adam to Noah because it acts as a frame around all of Genesis 5:1-11:26.

Genesis 5:1-32		Genesis 10:1-32		Genesis 11:10-26	
Vertical Genealogy	Sons of God + the Flood	Horizontal Genealogy	Babylon + the Scattering	Vertical Genealogy	
This is the scroll of the generations ... (5:1)		These are the generations ... (10:1)		These are the generations ... (11:10)	
10 generations From Adam to Noah Ends with 3 sons		From Noah to 70 nations Noah's 3 sons		10 generations From Shem to Abram Ends with 3 sons	
The chosen line		The non-chosen lines		The chosen line	
Babylon Cities. Created by Tim Mackie for BibleProject Classroom: Noah to Abraham (2020).					

The literary form of the genealogy matches closely with the genealogy in Genesis 5 but without the death notice (“and he died”) for each generation. Notice that this death formula has been supplied in the OG and Samaritan Pentateuch versions of this genealogy (καὶ ἀπέθανεν / וימת).

Instead of emphasizing death through repetition as in chapter 5, this genealogy emphasizes birth and multiplication, leading to the one generation who is barren—Sarah in [Genesis 11:30](#).

The genealogy of the sons of Noah sits in the middle of this large text block, which links together the 10 generations from Adam to Noah (Gen. 5) and the 10 generations from Shem to Abram (Gen. 11:10-27). This is the main thread of the narrative focus, which traces the seed of the woman from Genesis 3:15.

The genealogy in the middle of this sequence (Gen. 10) is the Table of Nations from the sons of Noah. This text traces the non-chosen lineage of Noah’s three sons—Japheth, Ham, and Shem—and their lines up to the division between Joktan and Peleg. On either side of the non-chosen lines are the rebellious disasters of the flood generation (Gen. 6-9) and Babylon (Gen. 11:1-9). These low moments in the story are framed by God’s preservation and gracious selection of one human line that will bear the promised seed.

Journey From Babylon to Canaan Part 1: Translation and Literary Design of Genesis 11:27-12:5

Introduction

²⁷ Now these are the generations of Terakh.

Part 1: Terakh's Journey

Death and Barrenness in Ur-Kasdim

- a **Terakh** caused the birth of **Avram**, **Nakhor** and **Haran** ;
a' and Haran caused the birth of **Lot** .
b 28 And **Haran died before his father Terakh**
c in **the land of his family**,
c in **Ur of the Chaldeans** .
- a 29 And **Avram** and **Nakhor** took wives for themselves,
b **the name of Avram's wife was Sarai** ;
c and **the name of Nakhor's wife was Milkah**,
c' the **daughter of Haran**, the father of **Milkah** and Iskah.
b' 30 **And Sarai was barren, she had no child** .

Terakh Takes His Family

- 31 **And Terakh took (ויקח תרח...)**
Avram his son
and Lot , the son of Haran, the son of his son,
and Sarai his daughter-in-law, his son Avram's wife;

They Go Out of Ur To Enter Canaan but Don't Reach It

- and they went out** with them from **Ur of the Chaldeans**
in order to go to the land of Canaan ;
and they went as far as Haran, and they settled there.

Terakh Age + Death in Haran

- 32 And **the days of Terakh were five years and two hundred years**;
and Terakh died in Haran .

Part 2: Avram's Journey

Blessing and Children in the Promised Land

- 12:1 And Yahweh said to Avram,
a "Get yourself going
b **from your land**,
b' and **from your family**,
b' and **from your father's house** ,
a' to the land which I will show you.

- a 2 **And I will make you a great nation** ,
 b and I will bless you,
 a' and I will make your name great;
 b' and so you shall be a blessing.
 a 3 And I will **bless**
 b **those who bless** you,
 b' and **the one who** treats you as **cursed**
 a' I will **curse**;
 a and in you all the **families of the land**
 b will find blessing."

Avram's Age + Exit From Haran

4 And Avram went just as Yahweh spoke to him, and Lot went with him,
 and **Avram was five and seventy years** **when he went out from Haran** .

Avram Takes His Family

5 **And Avram took** (ויקח אברם...) **Sarai his wife and Lot** the son of his brother
 and all their possessions which they possessed
 and the people whom they had acquired in Haran,

They Go Out of Haran To Enter Canaan and Do Reach It

and they went out
in order to go to the land of Canaan
and they went the land of Canaan.

Genesis 11:27-12:5. Translation and Literary Design by Tim Mackie for BibleProject Classroom: Noah to Abraham (2020).

Notice how this two-step journey is also a two-generation journey. Abram completes what Terah begins, but only because of the word of God that comes to Abram.

Terah's journey begins with two tragic notes: Haran's death and the barrenness of his daughter-in-law Sarai. Sarai's infertility also highlights the contrast between her and her sister-in-law Milcah. They both have royal names ("princess" and "queen"), but Milcah's identity is described in terms of her family relations, while Sarai's identity is described only in relation to her inability to have children.

Terah's journey begins with these tragic notes and then moves in a three-stage process from (1) "taking," to (2) "going out," to then (3) arriving in Haran where Terah dies. Terah's journey begins with Haran's death and ends with his own death in another Haran.

Abram's journey begins with a recall of the two tragic notes that began Terah's journey. He is to leave his family and father's house (marked by death), and God will make him a great nation (thus reversing Sarai's infertility).

Not only will God reverse the tragedies of his family of origin, but he will also bring about an abundant Genesis 1 blessing that will flow out from him to the other families of the nations.

Once Abram has received this divine word of blessing that reverses his father's fate, he begins his own three-step process of (1) "taking," (2) "going out," and then (3) arriving in Canaan.

Abram's Journey: Translation and Literary Design of Genesis 12:6-9

Avram's Sojourn to Shechem

- a 6 **And Avram passed through (ויעבר) in the land**
- b **unto the** place of Shechem
- b' **unto the** oak of Moreh,
- a' and the Canaanite was then **in the land**.

Worship + Altar for Yahweh

- a 7 And **Yahweh appeared to Avram** and he said,
- b "To your seed I will give this land."
- a' And **he built there an altar to Yahweh who appeared to him**.

Avram's Sojourn to Bethel

- a 8 **And he moved on (ויעתק) from there**
- b to the hill **from the east** of **Bethel**,
- a' and he spread out his tent,
- b' **Bethel** on the west
- b' and Ai **from the east**;

Worship + Altar for Yahweh

- a and **he built there an altar to Yahweh**
- a' and **he called upon the name of Yahweh**.

Avram's Sojourn to the Negev

- a 9 **And Avram journeyed (ויסע),**
- a' continually **journeying (נסוע)** to the Negev.

Genesis 12:6-9. Translation and Literary Design by Tim Mackie for BibleProject Classroom: Noah to Abraham (2020).

Abram completes the journey that his father began when he finally arrives in Canaan. Notice how the scenes alternate precisely between three journey stages. The three stages are punctuated by two stops in Shechem and Bethel, where Abram builds altars and worships Yahweh, who called him and his family out of Ur of the Chaldeans.

A Tale of Two Sojourns

The text of Genesis 11:1-12:9 presents the stories of Babylon and Abram as two parallel journeys. One ends in rebellion and disaster, the other begins with disaster and ends in blessing.

Genesis 11:1-9 A Sojourn Into Disaster	Genesis 11:27-12:9 A Sojourn Into Blessing
Begins with “all the land ... journeying (נסע) from the east (מקדם)” [11:1-2] Concludes with “all the land” being “scattered” (נפוץ / הפיץ) [11:9]	Begins with one family leaving (ויצאו) the place of scattering, Ur of Chasdim [11:31] Concludes with Avram “journeying” (נסע) into Canaan in places “from the east” (מקדם) [12:8-9]
They find a “plain in Shinar” and “they settled there” (וישבו שם) [11:2]	They come to Haran and “they settled there” (וישבו שם) [11:31]
“Let us build (בנה) for ourselves a city and tower” [11:4] “... the city and tower which the sons of ‘adam built (בנה) for themselves” [11:5]	“and Yahweh said” (ויאמר יהוה) [12:1] followed by a reversal of circumstances — from barrenness to birth
“Let us make a name (שם) for ourselves” [11:4]	“I will make great your name (שם) [12:2]
“and Yahweh said” (ויאמר יהוה) [11:6] followed by a reversal of circumstances — from building to scattering	“and [Avram] built (בנה) there an altar to Yahweh” [12:7] “and [Avram] built (בנה) there an altar to Yahweh and he called upon the name (שם) of Yahweh.” [12:8]
A westward sojourn that ends with settlement by humans who use their potential for their own name, so that Yahweh becomes the antagonist and reverses their circumstances	A westward sojourn that ends with settlement by humans who have no potential to make a name for themselves, so that Yahweh becomes the protagonist and reverses their circumstances
Tale of Two Sojourns. Created by Tim Mackie for BibleProject Classroom: Noah to Abraham (2020).	

Reflection Question

What are your biggest takeaways from this class?