

JOURNEY THROUGH SCRIPTURE GENESIS TO JESUS

Studying Scripture From the Heart of the Church

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human love imaginable—that of parent and child, that of husband and wife.

Covenant love requires total self-giving: God gives himself to his people, and his people give themselves to him. This kind of love images the life-giving love of the Trinity. And since God destined us to share in his divine life, we need to learn to love as he does. From him we learn how to give ourselves fully—how to sacrifice ourselves—for each other and, most importantly, for him.

We can say that the Bible tells the story of God’s raising us as his family from infancy to adulthood. Little by little he guides us, chastises us, woos us and prepares us to be fit for the wedding supper of the Lamb of heaven. He calls us to divine, heavenly union with him, which can be symbolized best by marriage—the most ecstatic and intimate of human relationships.

This is our heavenly calling, our supernatural end.

Review Questions for Personal Study

1. How is God’s creation like the tabernacle and the temple?
2. How is Adam both a royal firstborn son and a priest?
3. What is the first promise that a savior will redeem the human race?
4. Read Romans 5:12–21. How does Saint Paul contrast the old Adam with the New Adam, Christ?
5. What are some practical ways I can draw strength from God to resist temptation and avoid sin?
6. How can I grow in an attitude of repentance when I commit sins?
7. Have I tried to “hide” from God? Have I refused to acknowledge my need for his mercy?

Recommended Verses to Memorize

Genesis 1:1–2

Genesis 1:26

Genesis 3:15

LESSON THREE

Noah and a Renewed Creation

This third lesson examines how God renews with Noah his Creation covenant. We look more closely at the narrative structure of Genesis 1—11. And we see how Christ fulfills in a new creation the covenants made with Adam and Noah.

Cain’s Sin

In the last lesson we looked at the first covenant in salvation history, the covenant in Creation with Adam and Eve. Though the sin of Adam and Eve sent humanity into a downward spiral of wickedness, God did not abandon the human family. God promised redemption through Christ “when the time had fully come” (Galatians 4:4). It is only in Christ that God’s covenant plan for creation is fulfilled at last.

As forewarned in Genesis 3:15, throughout human history there is ongoing conflict between the two seeds, the seed of the *woman* (righteousness) and the seed of the *Serpent* (wickedness). Adam and Eve have children after God expels them from his presence; immediately the “enmity” between the two seeds becomes evident in their sons.

From the beginning of time, people have come into God’s presence to worship through sacrifice and to open their hearts to God. Adam and Eve’s sons—Cain and Abel—offer sacrifices. God accepts Abel’s sacrifice (see Hebrews 11:4), but he has no regard for Cain’s offering (see 1 John 3:11–12). This greatly angers Cain.

God warns Cain to guard his heart, to resist the temptation that is trying to master him. Tragically, however, Cain defies God, gives in to envy and murders his brother (see Genesis 4:7–8).

Just as God confronted Adam and Eve after the Fall, he questions Cain in order to bring him to repentance: “Where is Abel your brother?...What have you

done?” (Genesis 4:9, 10). Like his parents, Cain has excuses. He refuses to confess, and he goes on to accuse *God* and others of injustice (see Genesis 4:13–14).

Previously God cursed the Serpent and the ground but not the humans involved, not Adam and Eve (see Genesis 3:14–19). Now God curses Cain (see Genesis 4:10–12). The ground will not yield fruit because Cain has defiled it by soaking it with the innocent blood of his brother. Furthermore, Cain is driven “east” of Eden, to be a fugitive in the land of Nod (which means “wandering”). Banished and ostracized, Cain has made himself a marked man (see Genesis 4:14).

God’s covenant curses are not a kind of divine mean-spiritedness. A covenant curse is an extreme form of fatherly punishment, designed to lead hardened sinners to repentance. God answers Cain’s dismay with the promise, “If any one slays Cain, vengeance shall be taken on him sevenfold” (Genesis 4:15). This illustrates what always has been true: God doesn’t punish us because he stops loving us; he punishes us because he *can’t* stop loving us!

Adam’s Family Divided

Following the loss of Abel in death and Cain in banishment, Adam and Eve have another son, Seth. Through Seth a righteous family line develops. The two seeds and sons—Cain’s and Seth’s—now emerge as two family lines in conflict.

Cain and the Wicked Line. Cain has a son and names him Enoch. Cain builds a city and names it after his son. The fact that Cain names a city after his son is evidence of his desire to glorify himself (see Genesis 4:17).

Seven generations from Adam we see the full flowering of evil in Cain’s line. Lamech—a descendant of Cain—takes two wives. He violates God’s plan for the marriage covenant in creation through bigamy. He is also defiant, violent, vengeful and murderous (see Genesis 4:19, 23–24).

Seth and the Righteous Line. Through Seth’s family proper worship is restored. They “called upon the name (*shem*) of the LORD” (Genesis 4:26). Here *shem* refers to God’s glory rather than one’s own. This phrase refers elsewhere to sacrificial worship (see Genesis 12:8).

In the seventh generation from Adam we see the full flowering of righteousness in Enoch. This descendant of Seth has a close relationship with God (see

Genesis 5:24; Hebrews 11:5). Thus the image and likeness of God in Adam—divine sonship—is renewed with Seth and his family line (see Genesis 5).

Genesis 6 intimates, however, that the Sethite line is compromised through mixed marriages with the women of Cain’s family. Seduced by their beauty, the Sethites (the “sons of God”) enter into illicit unions with the Cainite women, “the daughters of men” (Genesis 6:2). The wicked fruit of these mixed marriages are men of great pride and extreme violence. They are called “the men of renown” (Genesis 6:4)—literally, “the men of the name (*shem*).” Here again *shem* refers to the pursuit of glory, but it is their own glory rather than God’s. The offspring of these mixed marriages fall away from the covenant and embrace wickedness (see Genesis 6:5–6).

Saved Through Water

The wickedness of humanity reaches its pinnacle: “The LORD saw that the wickedness of man was great in the earth, and that every imagination of the thoughts of his heart was only evil continually” (Genesis 6:5). Further, “all flesh had corrupted their way,” and “the earth [was] filled with violence” (Genesis 6:11, 12). Noah alone “walked with God” (Genesis 6:9).

This state of affairs provokes God to pronounce severe judgment. He chooses righteous Noah to serve as the covenant mediator between God and people. Thus Noah and his household form a righteous remnant through whom God will bring about a new beginning. God instructs Noah to build the ark in order to save his family as well as representatives of every beast and bird.

Noah responds in obedience. By faith “Noah did...all that God commanded him” (Genesis 6:22; see Hebrews 11:7). Noah bears witness to a wicked generation of God’s impending judgment (the Flood) and his covenant mercy (the ark).

A New Creation. The Hebrew word for covenant, *berith* [beh-reet’], is first used in Genesis 6:18: “I will establish my covenant with you; and you shall come into the ark, you, your sons, your wife, and your sons’ wives with you.” The Hebrew statement that God will establish his covenant implies a *renewal* of a previous covenant. Thus God is not doing something radically new or different; he is promising to renew the covenant of Creation. He wants to renew his covenant with Noah’s household.

There are several significant parallels between the Flood narrative (see Genesis 6—8) and the Creation account (see Genesis 1—2). In both narratives a new world emerges from the waters of “the deep” (see Genesis 1:2; 7:11). The number seven recurs in both accounts: Noah and his family board the ark and wait *seven* days before the Flood begins (see Genesis 7:10); the ark rests in the *seventh* month (see Genesis 8:4); Noah sends out birds every *seven* days (see Genesis 8:10–12); Noah takes *seven* pairs of “clean animals” (animals acceptable for sacrifice) into the ark (see Genesis 7:2).

Additionally, Noah’s name means “rest” or “relief” (see Genesis 5:29), reflecting the seventh-day Sabbath mandate. The Sabbath is the sign of God’s covenant with creation; the rainbow becomes the sign of God’s renewed covenant with creation.

In the last lesson we saw how God established a covenant with Adam as *husband*. In this lesson we see how God renews his covenant with Noah as *husband*. Even more than husband, however, God renews his covenant with Noah as *father of a household*. There are four marriages on the ark, and Noah is head of the covenant family.

A New Adam. Thus God renews his covenant with Noah, his family and all creation through sacrifice and worship (see Genesis 8:20–22; 9:8, 17). He is called to “re-found” God’s covenant family, like a new Adam. Just as there are parallels between the Flood and Creation, so there are significant parallels between Noah and Adam.

Like Adam, Noah is told to “be fruitful and multiply, and fill the earth” (Genesis 1:28; 9:1). Like Adam, Noah is given dominion over the creatures of the earth (see Genesis 1:28; 9:2). Both Adam and Noah find themselves in a garden or vineyard (see Genesis 2:15; 9:20). Both Adam and Noah consume fruit that exposes their nakedness (see Genesis 3:6–7; 9:21). And even after the Fall, both still bear the image of God (see Genesis 1:26; 9:6).

God’s covenant with Noah renews divine sonship, restores royal dominion and resumes priestly sacrifice. But just as Adam’s family divided into godly and ungodly lines, so does Noah’s family.

The Table of Nations

Genesis 10 contains Noah’s genealogy, identifying seventy descendants who founded the nations of the ancient world. This “table of nations” is absolutely unique: No other ancient genealogy portrays the entire human race as one world-wide family. It reveals God’s fatherly perspective and purpose for humanity. It shows how the original unity of the human family in Adam is restored in Noah. It also demonstrates the ongoing pattern of human sin and divine judgment.

The table of nations helps the people of God understand their place in the world. It shows the righteous line, the descendants of Shem and Eber, who they are: bearers of God’s blessing to the human race.

Through Noah’s faithful firstborn son, Shem, God continues to build his covenant family. As we have seen, *shem* is also the word used for “name”—the term for “glory” and “fame.” While the wicked pursue their own vainglory, Shem’s righteous line seeks to advance the glory of God.

Ancient Israel traces its national origin back to the righteous descendants of Noah who bear the blessing: Shem and Eber. Shem’s ancestors are called “Semites.” Eber (from whom we get the word *Hebrew*) is the great-grandson of Shem. The children of Eber are the ancestors of Abraham, Isaac and Israel (see Genesis 11:10–26).

Conversely, the unrighteous line of Ham is the source of moral corruption and conflict. In fact, the rest of Old Testament history records the ongoing suffering of Israel at the hands of Ham’s wicked descendants. Ham’s line reads like a Who’s Who list of Israel’s enemies: Egyptians, Canaanites, Philistines, Assyrians and Babylonians (see Genesis 10:6–20).¹

The Tower of Babel. The conflict between the lines of Shem and Ham first surfaces during the building of the Tower of Babel in Genesis 11. The wicked people of the earth know that God once destroyed the earth with a flood. And like the people of that time, the descendants of Noah fall into sin and bring down God’s judgment.

They begin construction of a tower, an ancient temple, wishing to establish their own fame. They want to make a *shem* for themselves (see Genesis 11:4). They oppose the line of the righteous son, Shem. (Notice how this story is placed in between two genealogies of Shem, Genesis 10:21–32 and 11:10–32.)

The *Catechism* states that through the “perversion of paganism,” fallen humanity is “united only in its perverse ambition to forge its own unity as at

Babel (Cf. *Wis* 10:5; *Gen* 11:4-6). It states that the ungodly commit the sins of “polytheism and the idolatry of the nation and of its rulers” (CCC, 57).

At Babel God again brings judgment, this time confusing the people’s language. They are scattered to the four corners of the earth.

God’s covenant with Noah is far-reaching. Though sin shatters the human race into separate peoples, God extends his providential care to the nations. He extends his covenant with Noah to “all flesh that is upon the earth” (Genesis 9:17). “The covenant with Noah remains in force during the times of the Gentiles, until the universal proclamation of the Gospel (Cf. *Gen* 9:13; *Lk* 21:24; *DV* 3)” (CCC, 58).

A Flood of Comparisons. The covenant with Noah points us to the sacrament of baptism (see 1 Peter 3:20–21). The Flood is a type of baptism. Like the Flood, baptism cleanses us and destroys sin. Furthermore, as a kind of new creation appeared through the waters of destruction, so those who are baptized are new creations in Christ.

We also receive a similar warning: Just as Noah’s son Ham was saved on the ark but did evil and received a curse instead of a blessing, so baptism places us in a state of grace that needs to be maintained (see CCC, 701, 1219, 1269). As in the days of Noah, many in the world today have rejected the Lord. We need to devote ourselves to our sacrificial worship, as Noah and the righteous line of Seth did.

The Literary Framework of Genesis 1–11

At first glance the multiple genealogies in Genesis may seem like superfluous information. However, a closer look at these sections reveals the literary artistry of Genesis.

The various stories of Genesis are connected through the use of the Hebrew word for “generations,” *toledoth* [to’ leh dote]. Genesis 2:4 introduces the history of the human family by saying, “These are the generations (*toledoth*) of the heavens and the earth.” The same term advances the story through the lines of Noah and the patriarchs: “This is the book of the generations of Adam” (Genesis 5:1); and, “These are the generations of Noah” (Genesis 6:9).

The repetition of *generations* points to a deliberate literary framework. The term is used *ten times* in Genesis to introduce key figures in salvation his-

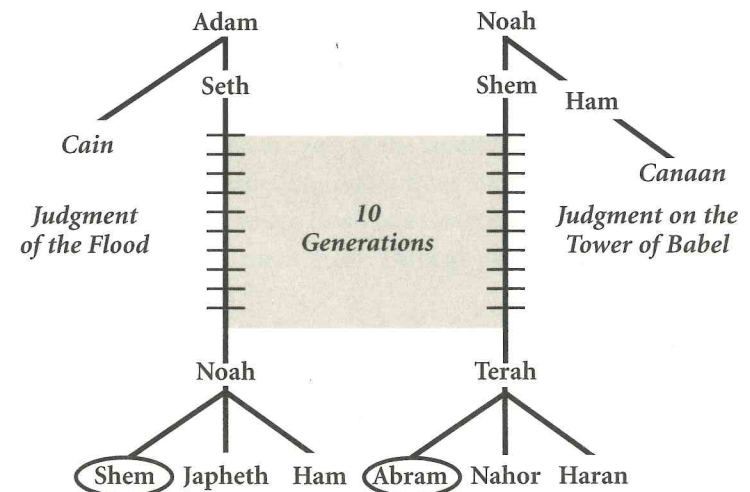
tory. It reveals the narrative plot of the history of God’s family. History is not just about wars, politics and economics; it is the story of the human race as the family of God.

The author of Genesis links Adam and Eve to Noah, Abraham and the rest of salvation history. We see this literary structure in the first eleven chapters of Genesis. It reveals that salvation history is shaped by spiritual conflict between the godly and the ungodly, that righteousness and wickedness travel down family lines and that God vindicates his family and judges those who corrupt it.

From Adam to Noah there are ten generations (see Genesis 5). The wicked of these generations can trace their lineage back to Cain. At the end of the ten generations, God sends judgment on the world in the form of a flood.

Noah has three sons: Shem, Japheth and Ham. Shem receives the blessing of the firstborn. Ham’s descendant Canaan brings forth the wicked of the post-Flood world. From Shem to Terah there are ten generations. Then God sends

The Literary Framework of Genesis 1–11



judgment on the Tower of Babel. Terah has three sons: Abram, Nahor and Haran. Abram receives the blessing from God.

In the past two lessons we have looked at the conflict within the human family, a conflict between two *seeds* (see Genesis 3:15), two *sons* (see Genesis 4–5; 10) and two *lines* (the *righteous* and the *unrighteous*). In his famous work *The City of God*, Saint Augustine understood Genesis in terms of two cities: the City of God, which is based upon the love of God even to the point of the contempt of self, and the City of Man, which is based upon the love of self even to the point of the contempt of God. Certainly we find ourselves facing a challenge: How do we live as citizens of the City of God while sojourning in the City of Man?

Review Questions for Personal Study

1. How is the story of Noah and the Flood like the Creation account?
2. How does the Flood prefigure baptism?
3. How does Christ fulfill the Creation covenant?
4. Describe the parallel structure of Genesis 1–11 in terms of *toledoth*.

Recommended Verses to Memorize

Genesis 6:5
Hebrews 11:1
1 Peter 3:21

LESSON FOUR

Abraham: Our Father in Faith

This fourth lesson focuses on God's covenant with Abraham and the connection between covenant blessing and trials for God's faithful people in the example of Abraham. God gives to Abraham the covenant blessing, and then through Abraham he gives it to all the nations. God rewards Abraham's obedience through covenant renewal, so that ultimately all those whom God has scattered because of the Tower of Babel can be regathered as the family of God.

We conclude with a brief history of the sojourn of the Hebrews in Egypt, leading up to the Exodus.

And God Blessed Them...

From the beginning God pronounced his blessing on creation (see Genesis 1:22, 28; 2:3). Life—both the gift of life itself and life-giving power (“be fruitful and multiply”)—reveals God's blessing. The blessing of the covenant is given and received through the family. In fact, both natural life and covenant blessing are shared within the family and are part of the family legacy.

Genesis shows how the blessing passes from father to son. After the Flood God restores the blessing through Noah (see Genesis 9:1). Noah then blesses his firstborn son, Shem (see Genesis 9:26). Through Shem Noah's family receives God's blessing (see Genesis 9:27).

When humanity rejects God, attempting unity without God at the Tower of Babel, God scatters those who are in rebellion (see Genesis 11). Later he promises to bless Abraham for his obedience and through him restore humanity (see Genesis 12).

In Genesis 12:1–3 God uses the term *bless* or *blessing* five times. The divine blessing is transmitted through family lines (that is, Abraham's descendants). Furthermore, humanity will not be united through making a name for itself;