

## *Open Heart, Open Bible*

Genesis and Luke's Gospel

Linking theme: Covenant

*Passage for weekly reading (week 4):*

*Genesis 9 – 11*

Covenant (1) – with Noah

Genesis 9 introduces us to the way in which God works in our fallen world with mankind – He offers covenant relationship. The way into this relationship is through the shedding of the blood of a creature deemed to be “clean” (8 v.20), which the scripture has not defined for us yet. This first expression of covenant was fully inclusive in its scope, and yet limited in its outworking.

a) the covenant with Noah was inclusive - i.e.- everyone living on earth, or who would live on earth in the future, is blessed by its promises. It is unconditional and universal – man can be fruitful and multiply, and the earth will never again be deluged in the way it has. This covenant is unique in that it calls for no human response.

b) the covenant with Noah was limited - i.e.- it did not provide for forgiveness or reconciliation – it simply gave the opportunity of life on God's earth to Noah's family, and all of their descendants down the generations. It related only to man's temporal welfare. It had no bearing on his eternal state, since his condition before his Creator God is unchanged (8 v.22). It did, however, clearly demonstrate the mercy of God towards His creatures, and show that He still desired relationship with men, should they desire relationship with Him. They were still made in His image.

The significance of this covenant is that God is binding himself legally to allow life on earth to flourish, whatever the consequences of that will be. Man will experience life according to the attitudes he forms and the choices he makes. The world he now inhabits will nevertheless be significantly different than the world he once knew (9 v.'s 2&3). There will be fear between himself and the animals, and he will now kill them for food in a way that was alien to the original created order. He has become a meat eater. The one stipulation the Lord makes is that man is never to eat the blood of another creature. The blood of animals used for food must be drained away. Life is a gift from God, and must be respected as such. The sin of murder is a capital offence in His sight for this reason (v.6).

In v.'s 8-17, the word covenant is repeated 7 times. It covers not only Noah's family, but all the creatures coming off the Ark, who are given the divine blessing to be fruitful and multiply. The covenant has two elements:

- 1) the promise never again to destroy the earth and the life on it by a global flood.
- 2) the sign to mankind that God would be faithful to His word – the rainbow. Only mankind in relationship with God can interpret the sign and be blessed by it. The faculties of admiration and wonder are the Lord's gifts to man alone, that he may contemplate the nature of His creator and nurture his capacity of spiritual awareness.

It comes as a shock to read the rather sordid account of Noah's drunkenness and Ham's disrespect straight after the blessing of the Lord to the world so recently purged of sin. This is one of those Biblical instances where one who has come victoriously through a period of loneliness and testing fails in some way when the pressure seems to be off (cp. Elijah - 1 Kings 19). Fortunately, the other two sons respond in a better way. The wrongdoing of Ham seemed to lie in the fact that he broadcast his father's nakedness, rather than covering it, as if there was a perverse streak in him that Noah sensed in cursing his line the way he did. This perversion could well have worsened down the generations, for the peoples of Sodom and Gomorrah are Hamitic in origin.

The words spoken out by Noah have had far-reaching effects as they have borne on the whole of the world's growing population from this moment on. Ham fathered the Canaanites, through his son, Canaan, and it is he particularly who is cursed by Noah. The various peoples who inhabited Canaan, before Israel's conquest and possession of the land, all came from this line (Amalekites, Amorites, Hittites, Jebusites and others), therefore the Canaanites were eventually enslaved by the descendants of Shem. Shem became the father of the Semitic peoples, the Arameans, the Assyrians, the Elamites and, of course, the Chaldeans, from whom Abram and the Israelites came. Japheth is considered to be the ultimate forebear of the Indo-European peoples, and his territory has indeed been "extended" down the centuries. The reference to Japheth living in the tents of Shem could relate to the younger brother somehow enjoying the possessions of the elder. Since the later empires of Persia, Greece and Rome all had strong Japhetic blood running in their veins, they did more than merely enjoy their brother's possessions, they captured them and subjugated him!

Before reading the Table of Nations of ch.10, some important conclusions should be drawn from Noah's prophecy:

- 1) - all the races or people groups that are in existence come from Noah's three sons. Therefore every man and woman of every tribe and nation has the same problem of sin and the same need of salvation.
- 2) - the line of Ham through Canaan is under God's curse. It is only the line which comes from Canaan that is subject to this curse. Ham had other sons (10 v.6), who are not subject to it. Nevertheless, any individual belonging to Canaan's line can turn to the living God and be set free. Some "foreigners" did do this as Israel

displaced Canaan from the Promised Land in later generations. Salvation and deliverance is personal, just as response to the gospel is personal.

3) - divine favour comes through the line of Shem. Noah actually blesses God, not Shem, but because He is the “God of Shem”, Shem is blessed as he keeps covenant.

4) - Japheth will prosper as long as those of his line peacefully uphold Shem - i.e.- his territory will be extended, and he can live alongside his elder brother “in his tents”. He too will subjugate Canaan as long as Canaan is under the curse pronounced by Noah.

The dynamics created by Noah’s words will have powerful effects from this moment in time as nationhood develops.

Genesis 10 gives us the sons of Japheth, of Ham and of Shem, from the youngest to the oldest, and their sons after them. Only the three original sons are individuals. The sons born to them are not just individuals, they are also the progenitors of tribal groups which grew into nationalities. Thus, seventy tribal groups or nations came from these sons, and are identified here. No ancient nation has anything by way of recorded history that remotely compares with this Biblical account. Babylonian and Egyptian lists that seem to parallel this record merely list the nations conquered, and are therefore very nationalistic in style. This chapter has no such bias, other than to give early insight as to the eternal plan of salvation. It contains just that which God the Holy Spirit would have us know.

I comment briefly here merely on each of Noah’s sons as the founding fathers:

1) **Japheth** - his name means “open” or “expanded”. The entire western hemisphere is inhabited by peoples whose origins can be traced back to him. The beginnings of the European nations were mainly Japhethic, and the U.S.A. exhibits similar traits. North American Indians were very domineered by the incoming Europeans after the discovery of the New World.

2) **Ham** - meaning “warm” or “passionate”. Ham’s nature could therefore be impulsive and fleshly. The nation of Egypt is particularly born of him according to scripture (Ps.78 v.51, 105 v.23 and 106 v.22). He also moved into many parts of Africa, and then in later migrations to the Americas. Latin American peoples often exhibit powerful Hamitic characteristics.

3) **Shem** - means “renown”. His descendants settled in Arabia, in ancient Babylonia, Assyria, Aramea, Ethiopia and other parts of North Africa. They were nomadic shepherds mainly. About 500 years after Noah’s death, they began to migrate to the Mediterranean coast and the Nile delta regions. The Israelites who eventually conquered Canaan under Joshua were the particular group of Shemites through whom God chose to work, and whose seed the Bible story traces.

Because Genesis ch.10 has given us a record of the early development of peoples and races coming from the family of Noah, v.’s 1-9 of ch.11 are, in effect, a flashback, to enable us to have an insight into human disobedience. Man was told

to “**be fruitful and increase in number and fill the earth**” at the beginning of ch.9 (v.1), being repeated in v.7. The plan to settle in Shinar, and build a city there, with its imposing tower, that man might make a name for himself (v.4), was totally at variance with the plan of God. This need not surprise us. The Bible gives only an approximate idea as to how much time elapsed between Noah’s coming off the Ark and the building of the tower - anything between 100 and 350 years. Noah is still alive, and Abram has not yet been born. The Babel account is linked with the life of Peleg, for it was “**in his time that the earth was divided**” (10 v.25), his name meaning “division”. Peleg was born either 101 or 231 years after the flood. It is conjectural as to whether Arphaxad fathered a son called Cainan, who should be included in the line from Shem to Abram. According to a marginal note in most translations, Shelah was born of Cainan when Cainan was 130 years of age. Cainan’s name appears in Luke’s genealogy (Luke 3 v.36), so there is good reason for including him here. (Here, we have an example of a seemingly incomplete list). Peleg lived for a total of 239 years.

The leader behind the rebellion at Babel is generally thought to be Nimrod. According to one rabbinical account, Nimrod had defeated an army of Japhethites and was made king over all the people. He therefore became the world ruler. We understand from 2 Thess. 2 v.3 that the ultimate antichrist will be a man who will “proclaim himself to be God”, and the extra-Biblical knowledge we have regarding Nimrod puts him in this type of mould. Rabbinical history portrays him as having been a God-fearing youngster, but that power and the lust for it corrupted him, and he became a flagrant idolater. It is interesting that Cain, the first murderer, had begun to build a city well before the flood. Nimrod built the first post-flood city. The object of this later city was to become the one centre where men would congregate, the one place where they could be “secure”, under the one ruler who alone could give that security. So dominant was Nimrod in this that the rabbis call the ancient tower the “Tower of Nimrod”.

The Lord dealt with the disobedience of this generation by “confusing their language”(v.7). When communication breaks down, togetherness becomes impossible, and there was now no possibility of the unified settlement taking place the man had purposed. “Many are the plans in a man’s heart, but it is the Lord’s purpose that prevails” (Prov.19 v.21). From this point onwards, man did spread out across the earth, like it or not.

The consequences of Babel are twofold (sociology and linguistics):

- 1) The development of racial distinctives. Modern genetics shows that, when a large, freely interbreeding group is suddenly broken up into smaller groups, which from then on can only breed amongst themselves, different social characteristics arise very quickly. It can be shown that one pair of middle-brown parents could produce all shades of coloured skin, from very white to very black, in one

generation. The differences we can nowadays observe between one people group and another have not therefore evolved, but are simply different characteristics of pre-existing (created) genetic information. The environment plays an important but secondary role in producing certain combinations over others.

2) The beginnings of languages as we know them today. Scripture tells us that language became “confused” at this time. The easiest assumption to make is that the three foundational peoples (from Shem, Ham and Japheth) developed their own speech forms as they migrated, which would in turn have fragmented into related languages and dialects as time went on and distance increased. Philology (the science of the structure and development of language) recognises three “parent” groups of language - Semitic, Turanian (Asiatic) and Aryan. Semitic corresponds to Shem, Turanian or Asiatic to Ham, and Aryan to Japheth.

<u>Name</u>	<u>Age of Father</u>	<u>Meaning of Name</u>	<u>Significance</u>	<u>N.T. references</u>
1) <i>Shem</i>	100	Renown, to be renowned	God’s renown revealed through Shem	<i>Luke 2 v.32</i>
2) <i>Arphaxad</i>	35	To refresh , to restore through rest, to spread out	Lamech’s prophecy outworked down this line (5 v. 29)	<i>Matt. 11 v.28</i>
3) <i>Shelah</i> <i>Salah - K.J.V.</i>	30	A branch, or shoot of growth	Isaiah 11 v.1 Jeremiah 23 v.5	<i>Luke 2 v.4</i>
4) <i>Eber</i>	34	To cross over	The name “Hebrew” from Eber - Red Sea & Jordan	<i>Mark 6 v.53</i> <i>Jesus crosses over</i> <i>John 5 v.24 - so do we</i>
5) <i>Peleg</i>	30	Division, to divide	Division at Babel - also family - Joktan left, Peleg stayed	<i>Luke 12 v.51</i>
6) <i>Reu</i>	32	Friend or companion	Friend of God, as Moses Ex.33 v.11	<i>As we are</i> <i>John 15 v.15</i>

7) <i>Serug</i>	30	To wrap together, or to entwine, as a tendril	Strength of relationship - Ecclesiastes 4 v.'s 7-12	<i>John 17 v.'s 22&amp;23; Acts 4 v.'s 32&amp;33</i>
8) <i>Nahor</i>	29	To snort, or snore	Was he losing some of that God-given peace and companionship?	<i>Worldliness? 1Corinthians 3 v.3; 2 Cor.11 v.3</i>
9) <i>Terah</i>	70	Uncertain meaning - see below **	Name associated with idolatry	<i>Always a danger with God's people 1 John 5 v.21</i>
10) <i>Abram</i>	Born 22 <sup>nd</sup> /21 <sup>st</sup> C.'s B.C.	Exalted Father	Drawn out of idolatry	<i>Ephesians 4 v.24</i>

The above genealogical line is a continuation of that given in ch.5. That line took us as far as Noah. Now we are given the line of blessing from Shem to Abram. The style is exactly the same as the earlier record. We are given the age of the father when he bore the significant son, the length of his life from then on, and a note that he also had other sons and daughters. Again, the population of the world was increasing rapidly, even though average age was decreasing considerably. Shem lived for 600 years, whereas Terah, Abram's father, lived just over 200 years. Abraham himself lived for 175 years (Gen.25 v.'s 7&8), and that is described in the scripture as "a good old age". Times are changing!

\*\* The name Terah was associated in ancient literature with the moon god, and the historian Josephus describes him as an idolater. It is possible that he left Chaldea to avoid persecution, possibly at the hands of Nimrod, or those in his allegiance. Having arrived in Haran, he stayed there. Abram has nevertheless been drawn out with Him, and that was surely the Lord's intention. It was for Terah's son to complete the journey. Perhaps the more godly line of Shem was losing its savour. God intervenes at a low point to rekindle the flame.

### ***Food for thought / discussion / prayer***

1) We have seen in this week's chapters how Noah's prophecy in the form of blessing and curse over his sons has had massive international repercussions down the ages. Can you think of ways in which we continue to feel the effects of it today?

2) The account of the building of the Tower of Babel is another early instance of man trying to control his destiny – trying to be God himself, rather than yield to, and trust, the God who created him. This was the ground of the serpent's

temptation that hooked Eve - “you will be like God”. The root of all sin can be traced to human pride, and man’s endeavours to live independently of his Maker, believing that he knows best. God will always frustrate such pride - He “**opposes the proud, but gives grace to the humble**” (James 4 v.6, quoting Proverbs 3 v.34). Have you found this study in beginnings humbling? How?

3) Archbishop Ussher, writing in the seventeenth century, estimated the date of the Creation to be the year 4004 B.C. Modern Creation Science supports this time scale, whilst leaving margins for our own incompleteness of knowledge. We will never have the whole picture this side of heaven! God the Holy Spirit has nevertheless revealed to us that which we need to know (Deut.29 v.29), and as we will look at the Abrahamic covenant next week, we can be greatly encouraged by the words of David:

**The secret of the Lord is with them that fear Him,**

**And He will show them His covenant.** (Psalm 25 v.14 K.J.V.)

Let’s pray that we grasp more firmly the relationship that is ours with the covenant-making, covenant-keeping God as we read these wonderful passages from His inspired Word.

**Next week’s passage:** Genesis 12 – 17