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The Lines of Cain and Seth

(pp. 68–71)

OBJECTIVES

- The character of the line of Cain
- The character of the line of Seth
- Why God came to “regret” having created mankind

BASIC QUESTIONS

- What was the character of the descendants of Cain?
- What was the character of the descendants of Seth?
- Why did God “regret” having created mankind?

KEY IDEAS

- The descendants of Cain sought personal glory in a world of sin and violence, reaching their peak in the seventh generation (Lamech).
- In contrast, the descendants of Seth worked for God’s glory.
- The descendants of Seth were corrupted by the Cainites, and the two lines, thereafter intermarried, spread evil throughout the world.

Chapter 4

The Early World



Read

Genesis
4:17–5:5
6:1–9:29
11:1–9

The Evil Line of Cain

- The descendants of Cain sought only personal glory in a world of sin and violence.
- Seven generations from Adam, the line of Cain reached its evil peak in Lamech.

After Cain was punished by God, he was banished from the land and he went to the land of “Nod,” which means “wandering.” There he had a son named Enoch. After that, he built a city and named it after Enoch.

In fact, Scripture credits Cain’s line with inventing most of the things that make civilization possible. Another descendant of Cain, Tubal-cain, was the inventor of metalworking. And Tubal-cain’s half-brother Jubal “was the father of all those who play the lyre and pipe.”¹

But the descendant of Cain who got the most space in this list is Lamech. He came seven generations down. Seven is not only a covenant number; seven often is a symbol of perfection in the Bible.

Lamech had two wives—the first record of bigamy or polygamy in the Bible. And in Genesis 4:23–24, we hear a little song Lamech made up for them.

Lamech said to his wives,
“Adah and Zillah, hear my voice,
You wives of Lamech,
hearken to what I say:
I have slain a man for wounding me,
a young man for striking me.
If Cain is avenged sevenfold,
truly Lamech seventy-seven-fold.”



The first murder: Cain killed Abel out of envy—one of the traditional seven deadly sins, and one of the most dangerous.

68

ANTICIPATORY SET

Have each student work with a partner to **analyze the illustration** “The Body of Abel Is Found by Adam and Eve” by William Blake (p. 69), and then lead a **class discussion** using the following question:

- How did Blake illustrate the psychological impact of Cain’s fratricide?

Eve appears completely broken by grief. Adam looks at Cain as if asking himself, “What have I done?” Cain seems insane with horror and guilt. The bleak, volcanic landscape is on fire and the red sun is setting as if for the last time.

Lamech had defied God's will. The marriage covenant is the primary covenant, a holy institution created by God. But Lamech treated women as if they were objects to be possessed. And he treated men as objects, too, killing them whenever he felt like it.

Instead of treating other people as images of God, Lamech and his followers lived in a world of war and bloody revenge. Seven generations down from Adam through Cain, the line of evil has reached its ugly completeness.

Lamech's code of revenge was exactly the opposite of God's intention. In the Septuagint, the Greek translation of the Old Testament used by the New Testament writers, "seventy-sevenfold" is translated "seventy times seven." Jesus would turn the song of Lamech on its head when he answered Peter's famous question:

Peter came up and said to him, "Lord, how often shall my brother sin against me, and I forgive him? As many as seven times?" Jesus said to him, "I do not say to you seven times, but seventy times seven." (Mt 18:21-22)

Christians multiply forgiveness as disproportionately as Lamech multiplied his revenge.



The Lord said, "What have you done? The voice of your brother's blood is crying to me from the ground. Now you are cursed from the ground, which has opened its mouth to receive your brother's blood from your hand." (Gen 4:10-11)

69

FOCUS QUESTIONS

- ❑ **What infamous distinction does Cain's descendant Lamech have?**
He is the first man recorded to have had two wives, the first bigamist and polygamist.
- ❑ **What was similar about the way Lamech treated women and men?**
He viewed both women and men as objects to be used. He broke his marriage covenant and killed men who offended him in any way.
- ❑ **How is Christ's ethic of forgiveness opposed to Lamech's ethic of revenge?**
When a Christian is struck he is supposed to turn the other cheek, and he is to forgive a brother who sins against him not seven times but "seventy times seven." (Seventy-seven and seventy times seven are different translations of the same phrase.) Conversely, Lamech would slay a man for wounding or even striking him; whereas Cain took sevenfold vengeance, Lamech took "seventy-seven-fold."

GUIDED EXERCISE

Conduct a **think/pair/share** to determine the different occupations of three of Cain's descendants:

- Jabal
- Shepherd
- Jubal
- Musician
- Tubal-cain
- Metal smith

ADDITIONAL RESOURCES

The Regret of Adam and Eve

The ultimate consequences of sin—any person's sin—are rarely seen. Adam and Eve could not have foreseen their sin would result in one of their children having slayed the other. Might Adam and Eve have resisted temptation if they had understood how they were to change the lives of all their descendants until the end of time? Part of the mystery of sin is the extent to which it is the result of ignorance.

Though the Bible does not say, it is safe to assume Adam and Eve lamented the loss of both of their sons: one physically, the other morally. Like Adam and Eve, it is important for every person to consider the great effect of both good and bad actions on everyone else and acknowledge every action will one day be judged by God.

GUIDED EXERCISE

Lead a **class discussion** using the following questions:

- What would the world have been like without sin?
- How can you reduce sin in the world?

ADDITIONAL RESOURCES

The Lines of Cain and Seth

Sin turns people away from God and leads them fruitlessly to seek happiness in other ways. There are countless examples of “successful” people who have fallen away from God and cannot find happiness. This was true in the case of Cain and his descendants; though many important inventions came from their efforts, their human success was never able to bring them out of their sinful ways. Thus, another dimension of the mystery of evil is how, throughout history, evil acts often accompany temporal success.

What would the world have been like without sin? How can people reduce sin in the world? These are two important questions to consider (cf. *Guided Exercise*, p. 70.)

When two families are united in marriage, there is, to some degree, a mixture of cultures. A critical facet of every family’s culture is its relationship with God. When Seth’s descendants intermarried with the Cainites, they were tempted by evil customs; as a consequence, many righteous people fell away from their relationships with God. It is important for everyone to consider the impact of his or her relationships and friends; people should avoid situations and relationships that can lead to sin (“occasions of sin”).

The Righteous Line of Seth

- The descendants of Seth worked for God’s glory instead of their own.
- The People of God are his children, just as Seth was Adam’s child.

Meanwhile, Adam and Eve had another son named Seth. Now we hear about his line—the faithful followers of God.

When Seth had a son, he named him Enosh: “At that time men began to call upon the name of the LORD” (Gn 4:26).

That phrase “to call upon the name of the LORD” means to worship God. Notice the difference between Cain’s line and Seth’s line. Cain named a city after his son to make a name for himself. But when Seth has a son, his work is not for himself but rather for God. The men of Cain’s line cared only about their own glory. But Seth’s descendants, God’s people, put the glory of God first.

This is where the City of God begins and God’s covenant family finally begins to progress. We start almost with a new beginning in Chapter 5: “When God created man, he made him in the likeness of God.” Then Adam fathered a son, Seth, again “in his own likeness, after his image.”² In other words, Seth was Adam’s son in the same way that Adam was God’s son. God is not just our Creator. God is our Father as well.

Here we see two completely contrary cultures. The family of Cain reached its evil completeness in the murderous tyrant Lamech, whereas the family of Seth was built on worshiping God, “calling upon the name of the LORD.”



Seth was Adam’s son in the same way that Adam was God’s son. God is not just our Creator. God is our Father as well.

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FOCUS QUESTIONS

- When Seth had a son, Enosh, what does it mean to say men began to “call upon the name of the Lord”?

It means people began to worship God.

- How are Seth’s descendants different from Cain’s?

While Cain named a city after his son to make a name for himself, Seth’s descendants put the glory of God first.

- What conclusion should be drawn from Seth having been Adam’s son in the same way Adam was God’s son, each in the respective “image and likeness”?

God is not just the Creator of human beings, he is their Father as well.

The Sons of God and the Daughters of Men

- The line of Seth is tempted by the sinful practices of the Cainites.
- Breaking the marriage covenant, they spread evil throughout the world.

There are two groups—the Cainites and the Sethites—had to live on the same earth. As long as there is a world, grief, and injustice, there will be no harmony.

The descendants of Cain saw the whole world in terms of wars and personal glory. On the other hand, the descendants of Seth, although they worshiped God, still had the seeds of sin in them that would inherit from Adam and Eve.

As we read at the beginning of Genesis 6, "When men began to multiply on the face of the ground, and daughters were born to them, the sons of God saw that the daughters of men were fair and they took to wives such of them as they chose."

Who are the "sons of God"?

God created Adam in his own image and likeness, and Adam fathered a son named Seth in his own image and likeness. The "sons of God" then, must be the family of Seth, that family of God that built itself up, calling upon the name of the Lord. In other words, they are the original Church, *Seth's family*.

The "daughters of men," on the other hand, are the descendants of Cain. We know that in the seventh generation of the wicked Cainites, Lamech became a polygamist, taking however many women he wanted. Now the descendants of Seth were tempted by that same sin. They "took to wife such of them as they chose," implying that polygamy has entered into the line of Seth, the covenant family of God.

It was becoming institutionalized. We will find, as we get further into the Old Testament, that breaking the marriage covenant always brings God's judgment every time. In fact, the very next verse (6:7) tells us that God decided then to shorten our lives.

"Then the LORD said, 'My spirit shall not abide in man forever, for he is flesh, but his days shall be a hundred and twenty years.'"

But that did not stop the spread of evil. The book goes on to tell us, "The Nephilim [or "giants"] were on the earth in those days, and also afterward, when the sons of God came in to the daughters of men, and they bore children of them. These were the mighty men that were of old, the men of renown."³

In Hebrew, "the men of renown" is literally "the men of *shem*," the men of the "name"—which is what the word "shem" means. They were wicked tyrants who were making a name for themselves. As the lines of Seth and Cain intermarried, the whole world came to be dominated by the descendants of Lamech—*unjust, violent men, building a culture of pure evil.*

We see the result in Genesis 6:5-6.

"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. And the LORD was sorry that he had made man on the earth, and it grieved him to his heart."

FOCUS QUESTIONS

- Who were the *sons of God*?
They were the descendants of Seth before having intermarried with Cain's descendants.
- Who were the *daughters of men*?
They were the descendants of Cain.
- Why did God shorten the lives of men?
He punished men for their marital infidelity.
- Who are the *Nephilim*, or *giants*?
They are wicked tyrants trying to make names for themselves. They are *men of renown*, meaning literally, "the men of *shem*."

GUIDED EXERCISE

Conduct a **think/pair/share** using the following question:

- What was the state of the world by the time of Noah (cf. Gn 6:7)?

Men were wicked and God "regretted" having made them.

CLOSURE

Have each student write a **paragraph** comparing the persons of Seth's and Cain's lines.

HOMEWORK ASSIGNMENT

- Study Questions 1–8 (p. 83)
- Practical Exercises 1–2 (p. 83)
- Workbook Questions 1–13
- Read "The Flood" through "Another Story of the Flood" (pp. 72–75)

ALTERNATIVE ASSESSMENT

Have each student **free write** for five minutes about the harm done to the descendants of Cain and Seth by the wounds of Original Sin.

Noah and the Flood

(pp. 72–75)

OBJECTIVES

- Why God sent the great Flood to destroy humanity
- The universality of deluge stories in early cultures
- God's covenant with Noah
- The Flood as a type of Baptism

BASIC QUESTIONS

- Why did God send the Flood?
- Are there other flood stories in early cultures?
- What covenant did God make with Noah?
- How is the Flood a type of Baptism?

KEY IDEAS

- Because of the wicked violence of the human race, God sent a great Flood, saving only one righteous man and his family along with representatives of every beast and bird.
- Flood stories are found all over the ancient world, and there is archaeological evidence that an event of this kind occurred.
- God created a new covenant with man through Noah never again to destroy the world by flood, the sign of which is the rainbow.
- The Flood is a type of Baptism because, through the waters of the Flood, Noah was given life anew; similarly, through the waters of Baptism, a person is given new life.

ANTICIPATORY SET

Read aloud the selection from St. Augustine's *City of God* (p. 102), and then lead a **class discussion** to explain "anger" and "repent" when attributed to God.

The Flood

- The wicked violence of the human race provoked God to send a great flood.
- One righteous man was saved, along with his family and representatives of every beast and bird.

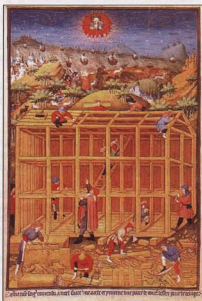


Illustration of Noah's Ark, showing the wooden structure and animals inside.

With the lines of Cain and Seth integrated, almost the whole world had gone over to the side of evil. Genesis tells us that "the earth was filled with violence."⁴ There was one righteous family left: Noah, his wife, his three sons, and their wives. "Noah was a righteous man, blameless in his generation" (Gn 6:9).

So God decided to make a new beginning, starting the human race over again with Noah as the founder. "I will blot out man whom I have created from the face of the ground, man and beast and creeping things and birds of the air, for I am sorry that I have made them."

Noah, therefore, was instructed to build an "ark"—a giant boat capable of carrying his family and enough animals to repopulate the earth. God would send a great flood, but Noah would be saved, and God promised, "I will establish my covenant with you" (Gn 6:18).

We see the number seven throughout the story of the Flood. Noah took seven pairs of each clean animal, seven pairs of each bird, and one pair each of all the rest,⁵ and they followed him into the ark. Then God shut the door behind them. After seven days, the flood came.

The rain poured down from the sky, and water came up from the deep. For forty days and forty nights it rained. Forty is another important symbolic number in Scripture. Periods of trial and repentance often come in forties in the Bible; later we will see how Israel wandered forty years in the desert, and how Jesus fasted forty days. Even now, the season of Lent, our yearly time of repentance and fasting, takes up forty days in the Church calendar.

For 150 days⁶ there was nothing but water. Then at last the waters started to recede, and in the seventh month the ark came to rest on Ararat, a mountain in what is today eastern Turkey.⁷

But what condition was the rest of the world in? Noah sent out a raven to see whether there might be dry land yet. The raven, which did not return, "went to and fro until the waters were dried up on the earth." Then he sent out a dove, and the dove returned to him. After seven days, he sent out the dove again, and this time the dove came back with an olive branch. Now Noah knew the waters had begun to go down. The next time he sent out the dove, seven days later, it did not come back.⁸

Finally Noah released his passengers, and the animals spread out to repopulate the earth. Then he built an altar to offer sacrifice to the Lord. Like Adam, Noah would be the priest for his whole family—which, after the Flood, was all that was left of humanity.

Above: Noah builds the ark to God's specifications: 300 cubits long, 50 cubits wide, and 30 cubits high. Traditional pictures of the ark show something shaped like a boat. However, the Hebrew word for "ark" is "tebah," meaning "box" or "chest" and may suggest the actual shape of the ark. A box shape would seem more practical for stability and volume and consistent with the narrative, considering the nature of the deluge.

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FOCUS QUESTIONS

- Why did God decide to start the human race over with Noah?
The earth was full of violence except in Noah, who was the only "righteous man." God decided to "blot out" all living creatures, having become "sorry" he had made them.
- What is the importance of the number seven in the story of Noah?
Noah took seven pairs of each clean animal and seven pairs of each bird. Seven days after God shut the door of the ark, the Flood came. The number seven in Scripture symbolizes perfection.
- What is the importance of the number forty in Scripture?
The number forty symbolizes trial and repentance. For example, the Deluge was fueled by water for forty days. Israel wandered for forty years in the desert. Christ fasted for forty days in the wilderness before his temptation.

Did the Flood Really Happen?

For a long time, Bible scholars tried to prove that there had been a flood over the whole earth, while scientists simply ignored the Bible story. But more recently, scientists and Bible scholars have been coming closer to agreement. Many geologists and archaeologists now think that the story of the Flood refers to a real geological event. Meanwhile, anthropologists point out that similar stories of a disastrous flood—and one family who survived it—are found in cultures all over the Middle East and Europe.

Archaeologists point out that Mesopotamia, the part of the Middle East where civilization first developed, sometimes went through terrible floods. A layer of flood deposit at Ur, one of the most ancient cities in Mesopotamia, showed that the city had been wiped out in some great disaster. Later in the Book of Genesis, we read that Abraham, the ancestor of all the people of Israel, came from Ur. He and his family might easily have learned the true story of the Flood at Ur with them when they moved west.

One of the most interesting theories puts the Flood farther back than that. In a book called *Noah's Flood*, two marine archaeologists point out that the Black Sea was an isolated lake until a few thousand years ago. Some of the first steps toward civilization were taken around that lake. When the Mediterranean Sea broke through (perhaps during a great storm), the water came in so suddenly and violently that all the towns and villages were under water in a few days. We know from other evidence that Oral Tradition can preserve a story accurately for thousands of years. The book suggests that this Black Sea flood was the source of the story of Noah and all the other flood stories. Since the book was published, surveys have found whole towns on the floor of the Black Sea.

Neither of those theories necessarily contradicts the general sense of the Bible. The Hebrew word translated as “world” in the Flood story could also mean “countryside,” so the sacred writers might have meant that the land as far as anyone could see was submerged.

Of course, the question of where the story came from is not really important to understanding the Bible. The important thing is to understand what the story says about our relationship with God.



Mount Ararat, the tallest peak in modern Turkey, is a snow-capped dormant volcanic cone, located in far northeast Turkey, 10 miles west of Iran and 20 miles south of Armenia. The mountain rises 16,945 feet above the surrounding plains. The Book of Genesis identifies this mountain as the resting place of Noah's Ark after the great flood.

“Ararat” is a version of the name “Uruhu” from the Hebrew Torah written by Moses which only included the components “ert.”



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ADDITIONAL RESOURCES

The Flood

From the beginning of creation, the Lord has preserved a remnant of his people to start over. The first example is Noah; it is an account of God's punishment for sin and mercy and love for his people. Though God could have just given up, he always offers another chance. This is one reason nobody should never give up on the spiritual life; no matter what anyone has done, God will always take him or her back through the Sacraments of Baptism and Penance.

Through the Flood and the subsequent covenant with Noah, God offered people a chance to start over, as he does for each person in Baptism: sin is washed away. God saved Noah and his family and commanded them, “Be fruitful and multiply.” This new beginning is expressed by the sign of the rainbow.

FOCUS QUESTIONS

- Are the Israelites the only people with a flood story?
No; similar stories are found in cultures all over the Middle East and Europe.
Extension: There are similar stories found all over the world.
- What story might Abraham have brought with him from Ur?
Ur was once destroyed by a great flood; he may have brought this story with him.
- What thesis is argued in the book *Noah's Flood*?
Noah's Flood argues the various flood stories originated from an actual geological event that took place only a few thousand years ago. Because of the rise in sea level of the Mediterranean Sea due to melting glaciers, the Mediterranean broke through the Bosphorus a few thousand years ago, turning a large, freshwater lake into the Black Sea, flooding whole towns in just a few days.

GUIDED EXERCISE

Conduct a **think/pair/share** using the following question.

- After the Flood, why did God decide not to curse the ground any more because of man?

God decided not to curse the ground because of man not because the line of Noah was without sin but because it was sinful: "the imagination of man's heart is evil from his youth."

GUIDED EXERCISE

Have each student complete a **paragraph shrink** on the paragraph "Christians see the Flood..." (p. 74).

The Flood is a type of Baptism in which a person's sins are washed away; he or she is made into a new creation. The new Christian is blessed by God, but he or she still carries the potential for sin.

The Covenant with Noah

- Noah and his family after the Flood are the beginnings of a new creation.
- Christians see the Flood as a "type" of baptism.

It was a new creation. The human race was founded again, with a righteous man as its progenitor. But had the Flood eliminated sin? No! He might have been righteous, but Noah was not perfect. Like every human, he inherited the sinful nature of Adam and Eve.

God knew, of course, that we would sin again. "I will never again curse the ground because of man," God said after Noah's sacrifice—not because the line of Noah was without sin, but for exactly the opposite reason: "for the imagination of man's heart is evil from his youth."

Then God blessed Noah and his family, saying to them, "Be fruitful and multiply, and fill the earth."⁹ Those are the same words God spoke to Adam and Eve at the dawn of creation. As he did with Adam and Eve, God gave Noah and his family dominion over the living things of the world.

In fact, the story of Noah and the story of Adam are so similar that we can see a literary genius at work. The inspired author uses literary parallelism to leave us no doubt that the Flood begins a new creation.

After Noah's sacrifice, God established his promised covenant with Noah and his family. God gave them the earth and all its goods, to have dominion over them. But there were conditions. A covenant goes two ways: a blessing for abiding by its conditions, and a curse for breaking them. "For your lifeblood I will surely require a reckoning; of every beast I will require it and of man's every man's brother I will require the life of man. Whoever sheds the blood of man, by man shall his blood be shed; for God made man in his own image."

God promised Noah that he would never again destroy the world by a flood. As a sign, he placed the rainbow in the sky. When the rainbow appears after a storm, God told Noah, "I will look on it and remember my covenant which is between me and you and every living creature of all flesh that is upon the earth." The rainbow is a universal sign. By making the rainbow the sign of the covenant, God shows that this covenant ultimately applies to all creation—as did the covenant with Adam.

God made an everlasting covenant with Noah and with all living beings (cf. Gn 9:16). It will remain in force as long as the world lasts. (CCC 71)

Christians see the Flood as a "type"—a symbolic precursor in history—of Christian baptism. The story in Genesis tells us in a symbolic way what happens when a Christian is baptized. Our old world of sin is washed away, and we are created anew, reborn in the waters of baptism. Like Noah, we still carry the potential of sin with us after baptism, but we have received God's blessing and his promise that he will not destroy us.



God's covenant with Noah and all creation, the rainbow, touches the plain at the foot of Mount Ararat.

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FOCUS QUESTIONS

- What is the parallel between the blessing God originally gave creation and the blessing he gave Noah and his family?
In each blessing, God said, "Be fruitful and multiply and fill the earth."
- What positive and negative features does a covenant contain?
A covenant contains a blessing for abiding by it and a curse for breaking it.
- What is the significance of the rainbow in the covenant God made with Noah?
The rainbow is the sign of the covenant and a promise God will never again destroy the inhabitants of the whole world by flood.

Another Story of the Flood



When archaeologists found ancient Babylonian tablets that told a familiar-sounding flood story, the whole world seemed to be in an uproar. Here, as part of the Epic of Gilgamesh, was a flood story many centuries older than the oldest Bible manuscripts. Yet the story it told was clearly similar to the story of Noah. Right away, some people jumped to the conclusion that the story of Noah must be “derived” from this older flood story.

Of course, a few moments’ thinking is enough to show that their conclusion would not hold water. The story of Noah in its present form was written down later, that is true. But it could well be the record of an oral tradition that goes back thousands of years. The flood story in Gilgamesh might just as easily be derived from oral traditions of the Noah story.

What the story does prove, however, is that some story of a worldwide flood was known all over the Middle East. In fact, anthropologists have found Flood stories, and flood heroes like Noah, all over the world. It seems that every culture preserves the memory of some great catastrophe long ago.

In the Gilgamesh story, the gods have decided to destroy humankind with a great flood. But one of the gods rebels and decides to save one man and his entire lot of the beasts of the field into the boat.

Then comes the horrible storm, and everything is wiped out except Utanapishtim and his boat. The destruction is so horrible that even the gods are quivering in rage.

After seven days, the storm subsides, and the boat comes to rest on a mountain. To see if there is any dry land about, Utanapishtim releases a dove, but the dove comes back. Then he sends out a swallow, but the swallow comes back as well. Finally he sends out a raven, and the raven does not come back. Knowing that the waters have gone down, Utanapishtim releases all the animals and offers a sacrifice to the gods.

Clearly this is a version of the same story as the one about Noah—especially the details about sending out birds to see if the flood has gone down.

But although the story has some of the same details, it does not have the same overt at all. In the Gilgamesh story, the gods are capricious tyrants battling against each other, and they bring on the flood for no good reason. (In one version of the story, the gods decide to destroy humanity because people make too much noise, and the gods cannot get any sleep at night.) Utanapishtim is saved mostly because one of the gods wants to undermine the other gods. In the Noah story, it is the wickedness of human beings that brings justice from the one true God, and Noah is saved because of his righteousness.

How real? A relief traditionally identified with the ancient King Sargon II, from the palace of Sargon II, ca. 720 BC.



Clay tablet with the flood story from the Epic of Gilgamesh, one of eleven tablets which were in the collection of the Assyrian king, Ashurbanipal, seventh century BC.

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FOCUS QUESTIONS

- ❑ **What does the story of Gilgamesh prove?**
Gilgamesh proves a story of a worldwide flood was known all over the Middle East.
- ❑ **What detail suggests the Epic of Gilgamesh contains a version of the same Flood presented in the Book of Genesis?**
Birds were sent out to see if the waters had receded.
- ❑ **How is the biblical Flood profoundly different from the Epic of Gilgamesh?**
The biblical story is moral. The wickedness of men called forth the justice of the one true God, who saved Noah because of his righteousness.

CLOSURE

Have each student write a **paragraph** describing the Flood as a type of Baptism.

HOMEWORK ASSIGNMENT

- ❑ Study Questions 9–13 (p. 83)
- ❑ Workbook Questions 14–24
- ❑ Practical Exercise 3 (p. 83)
- ❑ Read “The Curse on Canaan” through “The Real Tower of Babel” (pp. 76–80)

ALTERNATIVE ASSESSMENT

Have each student **free write** for five minutes comparing the story of the flood in the Epic of Gilgamesh with the biblical Flood.

Ham and His Arrogant Children

(pp. 76–80)

OBJECTIVES

- The sin of Ham
- The origin of the enemies of Israel
- The aim of the Tower of Babel

BASIC QUESTIONS

- What was the sin of Ham?
- What is the origin of all the enemies of Israel?
- What was the aim of those who organized the Tower of Babel?

KEY IDEAS

- Ham's sin of disrespect toward his father, Noah, brought a curse on his son, Canaan.
- All the enemies of Israel are descendants of Ham.
- By undertaking the Tower of Babel, the Hamites usurped the covenant authority of Shem.

ANTICIPATORY SET

Read aloud the *Catechism*, no. 2259 (p. 84), and then lead a **class discussion** using the following questions:

- Is man the enemy of man?
- Are anger and envy the most powerful motivators of evil?

GUIDED EXERCISE

Conduct a **think/pair/share** using the following question:

- How was Original Sin manifested in Noah and Ham?

Noah got drunk and fell asleep in his tent. Ham showed disrespect to Noah by looking at his naked father and then telling his brothers about Noah's condition.

The Curse On Canaan

- Sin was not washed away by the Flood.
- Ham's sin brought a curse on his son Canaan, ancestor of the Canaanites.

Once the flood waters receded, Noah and his family had to start from the beginning. They had to find food for themselves and their animals. Noah became a farmer, and one of his crops was grape vines. At harvest time, he made wine from the juice of the grapes. In Genesis 9:20–27, we read the result of Noah's drunken celebration:

"Noah was the first tiller of the soil. He planted a vineyard; and he drank of the wine, and became drunk, and lay uncovered in his tent. And Ham, the father of Canaan, saw the nakedness of his father and told his two brothers outside.¹⁰

"Then Shem and Japheth took a garment, laid it upon both their shoulders, and walked backward and covered the nakedness of their father; their faces were turned away, and they did not see their father's nakedness. When Noah awoke from his wine and knew what his youngest son had done to him, he said:

**"Cursed be Canaan:
a slave of slaves shall he be to his brothers."
He also said, "Blessed by the LORD my God be Shem;
and let Canaan be his slave."¹¹**

In spite of the universal Flood, sin was not destroyed in the world. Noah and his sons were all descendants of Adam; they carried Original Sin with them. Ham's disrespect undermined his father's authority at a time when his was the *only* authority. His sin earned a curse on his descendants—in particular on Canaan, regarded as the father of the Canaanites, hated enemies of Israel.



Noah therefore gave his blessing to Shem—one of two cases in Genesis where the firstborn son didn't succumb to pride and end up being passed over in favor of his younger brother. (The other case would be Abraham.)

The role of the firstborn is always very important in a patriarchal society. When the family is the main unit of society and the father is the leader of the family, what happens when the father dies? Human mortality would create a crisis of leadership in every generation. The firstborn is the natural mediator between the father and the rest of the children—the one who teaches the others what the father's rules are. When the father dies, he is in a natural position to be the leader of the family.

But God chooses his servants according to his wisdom, not according to our rules. One of the recurring themes in Genesis was the preference for a younger son as heir instead of the firstborn. It started right at the beginning, when Seth becomes Adam's heir instead of Cain. That is why Shem and Abraham stand out: they are the only two firstborn sons in Genesis who fit the "usual" pattern. Shem's family would be the foundation of the People of God. Remember that the word "shem" means "name" in Hebrew.

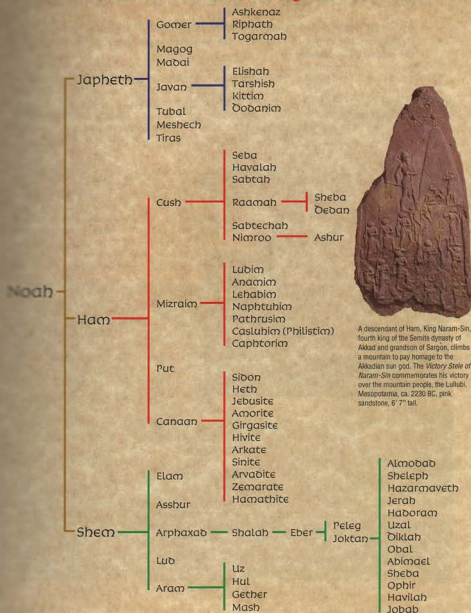
Above: *The Drunkenness of Noah* by Giovanni Bellini, ca. 1515

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FOCUS QUESTIONS

- What is the role of the firstborn son in a patriarchal society?**
The firstborn son is the natural mediator between the father and the rest of the children, the one who teaches the others the father's rules. Upon the death of the father, he is in a natural position to lead the family.
- What is the usual biblical pattern with respect to firstborn sons as leaders?**
Because God chooses his servants based on his own and not human considerations, the biblical pattern is to choose younger brothers, for example, Seth as Adam's heir instead of Cain.
- Compared to the rest of Genesis, what is unusual about Shem and Abraham?**
They are firstborn sons in the Book of Genesis who follow the usual human pattern of leading their families upon the death of their respective fathers.

TABLE OF NATIONS according to Genesis 10



ADDITIONAL RESOURCES

The Curse on Canaan and the Arrogance of the Children of Ham

The effects of Original Sin are passed on by human generation. Though Noah was a good man, he was not free from the inclination to sin (*concupiscence*), which is an effect of Original Sin. The same was true of his children; for example, Ham sinned by showing disrespect to the authority of his father. Though it has been said many times, it is always and everywhere necessary to stress the importance of the Fourth Commandment and to recognize God is the origin of all authority.

The genealogies in the Book of Genesis affirm the spread of Noah's descendants across the earth. As in the time of Abraham, having a great number of descendants was considered a divine blessing.

The story of the Tower of Babel is related directly to events that took place in Mesopotamia. The story is not told primarily to indicate the origin of languages, although many have drawn that conclusion. Some have suggested it is fundamentally about the pride of human beings who try to make names for themselves apart from God's will.

GUIDED EXERCISE

Have each student read silently the *Catechism*, no. 57 (p. 78), and then lead a class discussion using the following questions:

- Why did people want to unite at Babel?
- How does God want the unity of people to come about?
- What does it mean to say “the idolatry of the nation and of its rulers”?
- To what extent is making gods of one’s country and its rulers the story of the twentieth century?

The Arrogance of the Children of Ham

- All the Israelites’ enemies were said to be descendants of Ham.
- By building the Tower of Babel, the Hamites were again trying to usurp the authority of Shem.

The section that follows (Chapter 10 of Genesis) is what Bible scholars call the “Table of Nations,” because it tells which nations came from each of Noah’s sons. The most interesting list is the descendants of Ham. Egypt, Canaan, Philistia, Assyria, and Babylon all come from Ham’s line. In other words, all the nations that were the enemies of the Israelites are descendants of the wicked Ham. The people of Israel would see this list as a rogues’ gallery of evil oppressors.

On the other hand, the descendants of Shem would be the ancestors of the People of God. His great-grandson, Eber, gave his name to the Hebrews.



Of course, God intervened to put a stop to their scheme. God had sworn a covenant oath never to destroy the world by a flood again. Instead, he confused their language.

Before this time, the Bible tells us, all people had spoken the same language. But suddenly they could not understand each other. They had to give up the project. The city they had started to build, however, remained. It would be known as Babel or Babylon, and it would become the symbol of everything that was evil and decadent.

This state of division into many nations is at once cosmic, social, and religious. It is intended to limit the pride of fallen humanity (cf. Acts 17:26–27), united only in its perverse ambition to forge its own unity as at Babel (cf. Wis 10:5; Gn 11:4–6). But, because of sin, both polytheism and the idolatry of the nation and of its rulers constantly threaten this provisional economy with the perversion of paganism (cf. Rom 1:18–23). (CCC 57)

Meanwhile, the people of Shem went on worshipping God properly. Finally, after a few more generations, we come to one of the central figures of the Old Testament. His name was Abram, and through him God was about to perform the impossible.

Above: The Tower of Babel by Pieter Bruegel

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FOCUS QUESTIONS

- What is the *Table of Nations*?

Biblical scholars have given this name to the genealogies of the peoples that sprang from each of Noah’s sons. It is found in Chapter 10 of the Book of Genesis.

- What does it mean to *make a name* for oneself?

The Hebrew word for name is *shem*, which is the name Noah gave his firstborn son. To *make a name for oneself* means to rebel against the covenant authority of Shem.

- What did Babylon symbolize for the Israelites?

Babylon symbolized everything evil and decadent.

The Real Tower of Babel

The most impressive thing in any Mesopotamian city would have been its ziggurat, a huge pyramid-like structure with a temple on top.

Archaeologists tell us that these temple-mounds were more than high buildings. They were representations of the mountains where the gods were believed to live. The ziggurat was an artificial mountain of the gods. By building the ziggurats, the Mesopotamians thought they were literally reaching Heaven.

In fact, the ziggurats were so important to their religion that, in Mesopotamian mythology, the cities and their ziggurats existed before human beings were created.

Many scholars believe that the story of the Tower of Babel refers to the huge ziggurat that was built in Babylon. Like the Hamites in the story of Babel, the people who built the ziggurats thought they could build a tower to Heaven.

The ziggurat of Ur in southern Iraq dates to 2100 BC.



An artist's concept of a Babylonian market scene at the Gate of Ishtar and the imposing presence of a ziggurat.

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GUIDED EXERCISE

Have each student **read** silently the selection from *Dei Verbum* about the Old Testament (p.81), and then lead a **class discussion** to apply it to the content of this chapter.

FOCUS QUESTIONS

- What is a *ziggurat*?
It is an artificial mountain representing the place the gods were thought to live.
- What did Mesopotamian mythology posit about the *ziggurats*?
They existed before human beings were created.
- What is the likely relationship between the Tower of Babel and the Babylonian *ziggurat*?
Many scholars believe they are one in the same.

CLOSURE

Have each student **free write** for a few minutes about why it makes sense for the descendants of Ham to have been enemies of the descendants of Shem.

The descendants of Ham would have resented the curse of their ancestor. They also suffered from the natural effects of having wicked forebears. Later, the Canaanites would be enemies of Hebrews because they were living in the land God had promised to the descendants of Shem.

HOMEWORK ASSIGNMENT

- Study Questions 14–19 (p. 83)
- Workbook Questions 25–34

ALTERNATIVE ASSESSMENT

Building the Tower of Babel was possible because of the development of technology, namely, fired bricks and bitumen mortar.

Have each student work with a partner to **brainstorm** examples of the use of other technologies for wicked purposes.

Briefly **share** responses.



"He waited another seven days, and again he sent forth the dove out of the ark; and the dove came back to him in the evening, and lo, in her mouth a freshly plucked olive leaf; so Noah knew that the waters had subsided from the earth."

(Gen 8: 10–11)