

May 12- Genesis 9-11 The Tower of Babel

Chapter 9

Vs. 1-17, The Noah's Ark story concludes with God's finalizing of the covenant God made with Noah. This is the first covenant God makes in the Bible. After sending the people and animals forth from the Ark, it appears that this is an expansion of the promises of Eden. Now, humans who were once vegetarian are given permission to eat meat (so long as they allow the blood to drain from it first, as blood is precious to God and should be returned to God by allowing it to drain into the earth). Though animals are now permitted to be killed for food, human life is most precious to God because humans are made in God's image, thus it is an offense to God for either an animal or a human to take a human life. God will require a "life for a life" if human life is taken by an animal or fellow human. This will feature later in the law as the laws are written down in Deuteronomy. Beginning in verse 8, the covenant is established. God promises "never again shall all flesh be cut off by the waters of a flood and never again shall there be a flood to destroy the earth." Noah's responsibility in the covenant agreement is to "be fruitful and multiply." The sign of the covenant (the thing that reminds God and humans of the promise made, like a wedding ring) is the bow that God is setting in the clouds. God is referring to a "war bow", God is hanging up God's arms in favor of peace with humans and creation. The ancients believed that the rainbow was the bow with which God flung lightning bolts to earth, so the "war bow" is also associated with the "rainbow", that's what humans see as their sign of the covenant in the clouds. When we see the rainbow, we remember the peace God made with us, when God sees the bow, God remembers the promise not to destroy creation with a flood. God commits to the experiment of creation.

Vs. 18-29, Noah plants the first vineyard (the very first agriculture we're told about after the flood), and then becomes the first winemaker. Through this work, Noah fulfills the words his father spoke about him when he was born "he will provide relief from work." Unfortunately, with the first wine comes the first over-indulgence. Noah became drunk and passed out naked and was therefore utterly vulnerable. His son, Ham, "saw the nakedness of his father" and then told his brothers about it. This could either mean exactly what it sounds like, and therefore brought shame upon his father, or it could be a euphemism for Ham taking advantage of his father sexually, which could perhaps explain the severity of the curse that falls upon him and his descendants. Shem and Japheth behave respectably, covering their father's nakedness while not looking at him. This story provides a justification for Israel's later conquest of the land and peoples of Canaan in the book of Joshua, because it was destined to happen from the curse placed upon Ham by Noah.

Chapter 10

The descendants of Ham become the peoples of Egypt, Cush, Sheba, and Canaan. In the list of Ham's descendants, we see a foreshadowing of many of the enemies of Israel throughout scripture: Egypt, Babylon, Assyria, Nineveh, Philistines, Canaan, Jebusites,

Amorites, Girgashites, Hivites, Sodom, Gomorrah, etc. The descendants of Shem become the Semitic peoples. Eber is the father of the “Hebrew” peoples. And the descendants of Japheth become the peoples of Asia Minor and Greece, those around the Mediterranean.

Chapter 11

Chapter 11 begins with the cautionary tale of the Tower of Babel. Vs. 1-11, This story takes place in what we know as Babylon. It seems that all humans began to settle there, but hubris got the better of them. Typically, the kind of tower they speak of would have been a pyramidal structure used for the worship of God in this region, but instead of building the tower for worship, they set out to build a tower to reach to the heavens simply to prove that they can, to stretch the limits of human engineering achievement. The root desire of the humans in this story is not to worship God, but to make a name for themselves. Like the limits set in the Garden of Eden after the eating from the tree of knowledge, here God imposes limits on humans once again (for their own good), as this united hubris would lead them down a treacherous road (this is only the beginning of what they will do -think of how modern humans have built upon scientific discoveries to design catastrophic weapons of war, these are the kinds of achievements God fears human progress will produce). God confuses the languages to tamp down on human achievement so that they will know their rightful place, relying on God. This story is to explain how we came to have so many different languages around the world, and how the people spread out from one small geographic region to around the world.

Vs. 10-32, Noah lived for 950 years, but after the time of Noah the human lifespans became shorter and shorter until they were almost what we know today. There are 10 generations between Noah and Abram (this genealogy again marks the dividing line between the story of Noah and the story of Abram). This passage is the dividing line between the story of God’s relationship with all of creation, and the narrower story of God’s relationship with one particular family. Of course God continues to honor the covenant God made with Noah and all of creation, while expressing God’s love for humanity through the blessings that will be bestowed upon one particular family, called to be a blessing to all the world. Beginning in vs. 26, we get the story of Terah, the father of Abram. Terah had 3 sons, Abram, Nahor, and Haran, but tragically Haran died before his father! This will continue to be a theme of tragedy throughout the story of Abram’s descendants. The young sons of Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob will all be endangered or presumed dead, posing a serious threat to the fulfillment of the covenant God will make with Abram. Furthermore, we’re told that Abram’s wife, Sarai, is barren. This will also be a theme of tragedy from one generation to another, which threatens the fulfillment of God’s promise to make a great nation from this one family. Terah, Abram, Sarai, and Lot travelled from Ur (Babylon is the land of the Chaldeans), and settled in the town of Haran in Canaan. This is effectively where Abram grew up, where he lived til he was in his 70s. Therefore, when time comes for his son and grandson to find wives, both Isaac and Jacob will be sent back to Haran (also known as the city of Nahor) to find wives.