

The Descent of Man

Genesis 5-11

The Sons of the Woman and the Sons of the Snake

In one day, Adam and Eve fell from lords of a garden paradise to subsistence farmers struggling to eke out a crop using stone tools and sweat. They could no longer chat with Yahweh familiarly, but had to learn formal rites by which to worship Him. They were helpless to shake off the serpentine smog that had infected their minds, hearts, and wills. Their one hope was the promise that a child of Eve would break the Viper's corrupting power.

That promise was on the Snake-spirit's mind, too, no doubt. When Eve bore her first two sons, he conceived a plan to foil God's intent. He easily seduced the older son, Cain, into pride, jealousy of his brother's favor with God, and eventually murder. That got rid of the younger son, who might have become the Devil's foe.

Yahweh might have killed Cain for his crime, but He didn't. In mercy, He only banished Cain from His presence and predicted that he would pass his life as a restless, dissatisfied wanderer. Yahweh even marked Cain in some way to protect him from vengeance by any of Adam's future children.

Well, Cain married someone (a sister?) and had children, and

his children had children. But it was always "like father, like son." Cain's great-great-great-grandson was Lamech, a wanton prince who boasted that he would kill a man even for injuring him. He raised some ingenious sons dedicated to mastering nature and raising a civilization. (One son invented nomadic shepherding, a second musical instruments, and a third metalsmithing.) These men were making it without God, and proud of it.

Fortunately, Cain was not the only son of Adam left. Adam fathered a herd of children, but the Bible focuses on just one—Seth. Seth's descendants were a bit better than Cain's; they did their best to humbly acknowledge their dependence on God. But none became the promised Deliverer; each one fell in the end to death. The one exception, Enoch, lived such an exemplary life of love for God that he was taken to God without dying. It was a whisper of hope in a weary age.

For the Serpent was still at work behind the scenes. The Bible doesn't mention him, but his fingerprints are all over the data. The line of Seth was pure; these were the true sons of the woman. But the line of Cain became more and more a viper's brood with every generation. What if the two were blended? When you mix water and poison, which overcomes the other? If the only pure line of humans were tainted, then perhaps the Deliverer could never be born. Snakish reasoning.

By this time the Devil knew that even the noble sons of Seth were vulnerable to sexual seduction, and the brazen daughters of Cain knew how to seduce. The Bible says with its usual understatement, "the sons of God saw that the daughters of men were beautiful, and they married any of them they chose" (Genesis 6:2). Thus the line in which the character of God still shone mixed with the one whose traits were mere debased humanness. The result was a race whom people considered "heroes . . . men of renown," but whom God named the Nephilim, "the fallen ones."

He mourned. "[Yahweh] saw how great man's wickedness on the earth had become, and that every inclination of the thoughts of his heart was only evil all the time" (Genesis 6:5). Pride, lust, violence, exploitation—it was disgusting. Yahweh decided to wipe out the human race. (Did the Devil chuckle when he heard this?)

The Flood

But Satan hadn't won yet. There remained one descendant of the pure line of Seth. Noah was not the promised Deliverer, but he did honor Yahweh and try to live His way as much as possible.

He probably prayed to Yahweh regularly for guidance, and one day he got more than he bargained for. Yahweh informed Noah that He planned to destroy all human and animal life on the earth with a massive flood. When Noah recovered from the shock, Yahweh gave him detailed instructions for building a wooden ship the size of an ocean liner. He was to bring two of every kind of animal (plus extras of certain species) with him and his family into the vessel, so that the earth could be repopulated afterward.¹

So in a landlocked region hundreds of miles from the sea, Noah built his ocean vessel. His wife must have spent weeks trying not to notice the neighbors whispering. Imagine pairs of animals beginning to line up in your backyard. Then hauling them and their fodder into the dark wooden box shaped alarmingly like a casket. These people had some gutsy trust in their God. It was vindicated when the rain began to fall and fall and fall.

For forty days, eight humans and a lot of animals listened to rain pelt the ceiling of their ship. For another 110 days, they floated aimlessly. Maybe they wondered as the months passed whether God had forgotten them. "But God remembered" (Genesis 8:1).

The waters receded, and at last the ship landed on a mountaintop in what is now Turkey. Seven months later, the waters were low enough for the whole crowd to emerge into the sunlight. After more than a year in a floating box, solid ground must have felt like Heaven.

The Rainbow Covenant

Upon landing, almost the first thing Noah did was to sacrifice some of the extra animals as a gesture of thanks to Yahweh. It seems like a grisly thing to do, but Yahweh had commanded the practice to sear a lesson into His people's minds. Human selfishness is ugly. Not only is it treason against the rightful King, but it smashes every relationship and stains the whole creation. It

therefore merits the death penalty, and somebody has to pay the price. In His mercy, Yahweh accepted the blood of animals in exchange for that of humans. It was not a permanent solution.

In response to Noah's obedience, Yahweh covenanted in the sunlight of a freshly scrubbed world never again to deal with human evil through annihilation.² The sign of that commitment was light fragmenting through rain clouds into the full spectrum of the first rainbow. Sheer force had failed to achieve Yahweh's goal: freely chosen love from His people. He had a better plan.

Furthermore, Yahweh granted humans the right to eat meat (before this they were vegetarians) as long as they didn't drink blood. To humans, blood symbolized the mysterious power of life, and they had devised magical rituals of drinking blood to try to preserve or increase their life force. However, life was Yahweh's gift, and it was rebellion for people to try to take it against God's will. Magic was the epitome of Adam's sin: humanity's attempt to control power so that it need not depend on Yahweh's generosity.

The Nations

So Yahweh sent the humans and animals off to repopulate the earth. It was just as well that He had sworn not to engulf the world again, for it didn't take long for human perversity to reassert itself. Noah grew grapes and got drunk on wine; his youngest son, Ham, invited his brothers to mock the sot lying unconscious and mostly naked in his tent. Noah was livid when he awoke, and in his rage he prophesied the fates of all his descendants.

He cursed the line of Ham's son Canaan to be the slaves of his other sons' offspring. The Canaanites became a wicked Caucasian people who lived in Palestine. (We'll see what happened to them in chapter 9.) The rest of Ham's descendants filled southwestern Asia and northeastern Africa. God chose not to include them in their father's curse. One of them, Nimrod, founded the first "kingdom" — a state in which someone ruled not just a clan but a group of unrelated people — in Mesopotamia (modern Iraq). He did this by being the first to conquer subjects by force of arms. Nimrod was the first military dictator.

Unlike Ham, Noah's eldest son, Shem, loved Yahweh. To him Noah passed on the ancient hope of fathering the Deliverer. To his third son, Japheth, Noah prophesied that his territory would be great and that one day his offspring would share Shem's blessing of being God's chosen ones. The Japhethites became Europeans and Asians. The Shemites became the people we call Semitic: Arabs, some Mesopotamians, and Jews.

Babel

The descendants of Shem, Ham, and Japheth bred prolificly. By 7000 BC (archaeologists tell us) there were a few little farming communities with stone-walled cities and rock-hewn wells. By 4000 BC there were a lot of them. Many communities developed their own cults and dedicated themselves to their cultic gods. In rituals timed to the cycle of seasons, the people worshiped gods of rain, sun, and fertility. The community's chief was usually its priest.

Eventually, communities began to unite under one cult with one priest-king and one temple. The cult ran the kingdom. Those early religious states invented arithmetic to record economic transactions and astrological observations, and writing for legends, songs, poems, laws, and ethics.

Naturally, the descendants of Noah all spoke the same language. This made the gathering of communities into kingdoms easier. The people of Nimrod's kingdom believed they could control human destiny by reading the movement of the stars. To this end they invented the zodiac and horoscope. Their gods were the sun, moon, and the five planets known to them. They decided to build an immense temple-tower as a staircase from earth to the heavens.

On the same site we can still see the ruins of a tower called *Birs Nimroud*, perhaps a later attempted reconstruction. The base was built of mud bricks and tar in seven stages, like a staircase-hill. Each stage was painted a color that corresponded to one of the gods — black for Saturn, orange for Jupiter, and so on. On top was a tower painted with the signs of the zodiac, in which the priests sought to reach the heavens by magical rites. This tower was 153 feet high and covered nearly four acres.

The goal of the enormous tower was to win fame for its builders. They hated the idea that one day they would die and be forgotten, so they assuaged their wounded pride by striving for an immortal reputation (Genesis 11:4).

Now, Yahweh intended to one day unite all humankind in love of each other and of Him. But here they were uniting in honor of human pride and false gods (behind whom He saw spirit beings allied with Satan). Through their star magic, aided by their demon gods, they hoped to wrest control of human destiny from Yahweh. This was clearly another plan of that Snake to rule the world through evil people.

Yahweh had no intention of allowing a united world government on those terms. Unruffled, He simply touched the people's minds so that they could no longer understand each other. That put a stop to this project. The builders had called their city *Babel* (Babylon), which meant "gateway to a god," but Yahweh punned that it was really *balal* (translated "confused" in Genesis 11:9). A divine chuckle.

Then Yahweh scattered the people over the earth. They carried with them their false worship and their pride, but they were no longer powerful enough to hinder Yahweh's plan. It was an intricate strategy that set up His next critical move.

of the Old Covenant" — books about the old agreement between God and a certain nation of humans. Because the humans found it impossible to live up to their commitments in that covenant, God promised to make a new one. The New Testament records how God made that New Covenant and what life is like under that agreement between God and people.

NOTES

1. Calculations have proven it would actually have been possible to fit representatives of all land species into a ship of the size the Bible specifies, along with enough food and water to sustain them.
2. A covenant is an agreement between two parties: a marriage, a business contract, a political treaty, a friendship pact. Many covenants are two-sided agreements between equals. But the Bible records a series of covenants that God freely bestowed on people as acts of love and grace. These covenants tied God and people together like a marriage bond, a legal adoption into a family, or a king's agreement to rule a group of people with justice. The covenants were solemnly sealed with legal ceremonies.

The two big divisions of the Bible are the Old Testament and the New Testament. In modern English, a "testament" is a document that declares what people want to do with their property when they die. But in the Bible it is an old English rendering of the Hebrew word for "covenant." So the two divisions of the Bible are the Old Covenant and the New Covenant. The Old Testament could correctly be called "The Books