

Chapter 4

The Early World



*Noah and his sons are all descendants of Adam.
They carry original sin with them.*

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 seek only personal glory in a world of sin and violence.**
- **Seven generations from Adam, the line of Cain reaches its evil peak in Lamech.**

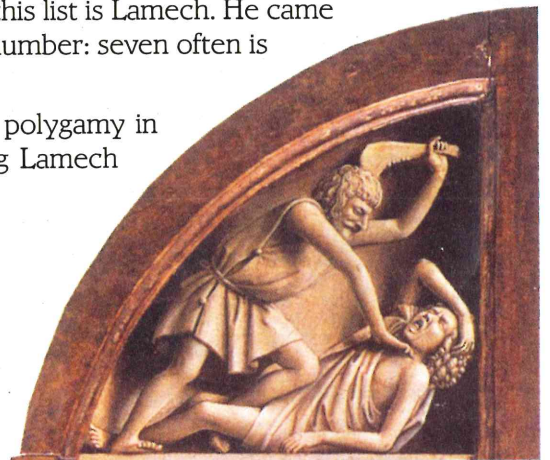
After Cain is punished by God, he is banished from the land and he goes to the land of “Nod,” which means “wandering.” There he has a son named Enoch. After that, he builds a city and names it after Enoch.

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 gets 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.

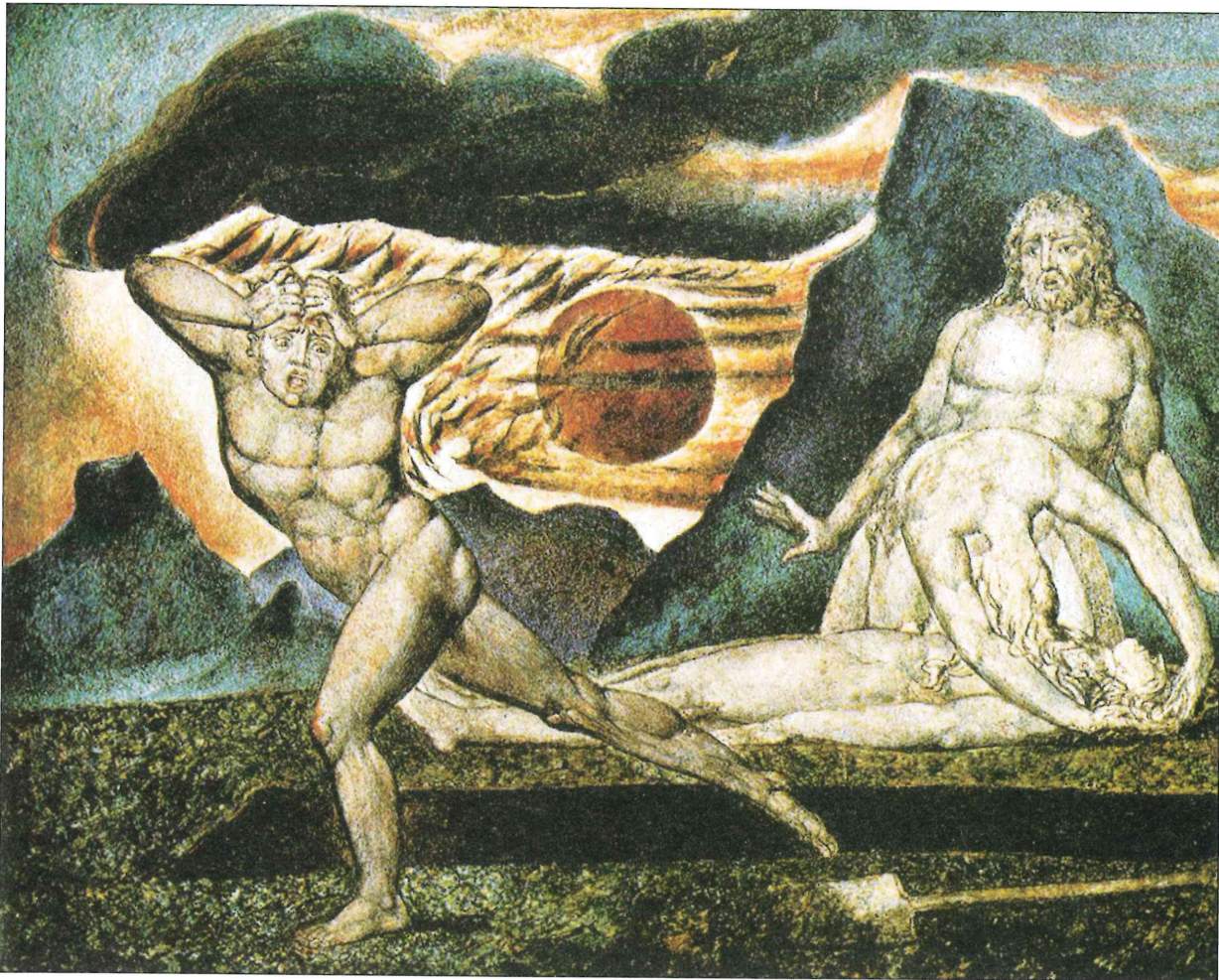
Lamech has defied God's will. The marriage covenant is the primary covenant, a holy institution created by God. But Lamech treats women as if they were objects to be possessed. And he treats men as objects, too, killing them whenever he feels like it.

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

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

Then 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.



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

The Righteous Line Of Seth

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

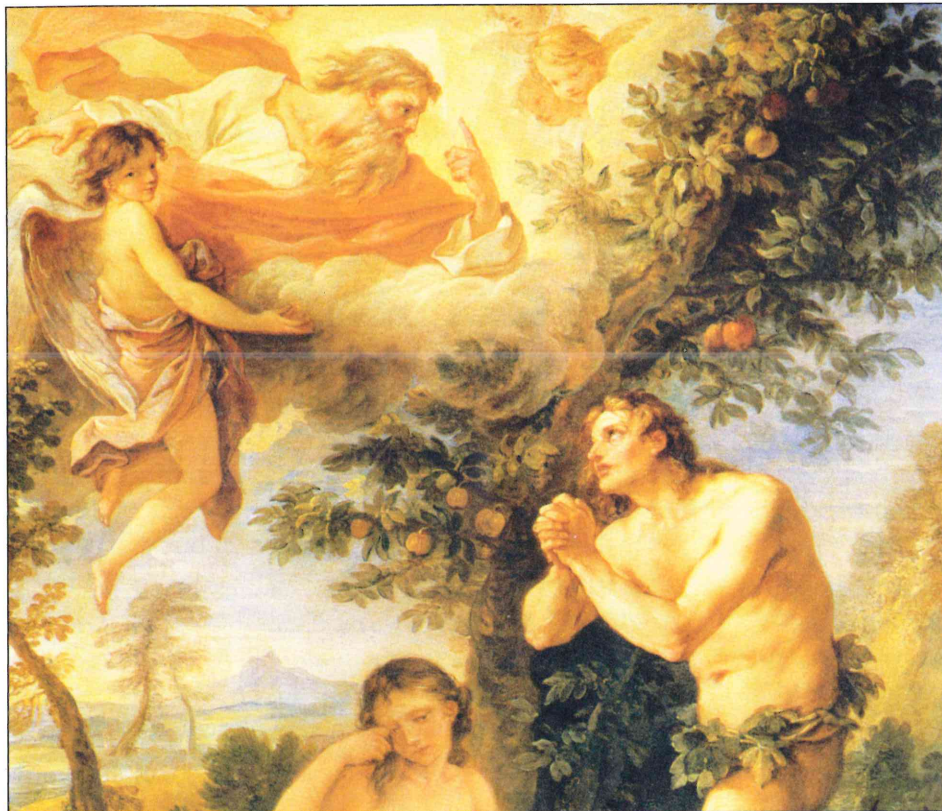
Meanwhile, Adam and Eve had another son named Seth. Now we hear about his line—the faithful followers of God.

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 care 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 isn't 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 isn't just our Creator. God is our 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.**

Those two groups—the Cainites and the Sethites—had to live on the same earth. As long as there is evil, pride, 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 we all inherit from Adam and Eve.

So 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, God’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.

Sin is becoming institutionalized. We’ll 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 (Gn 6:3) 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 didn’t 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

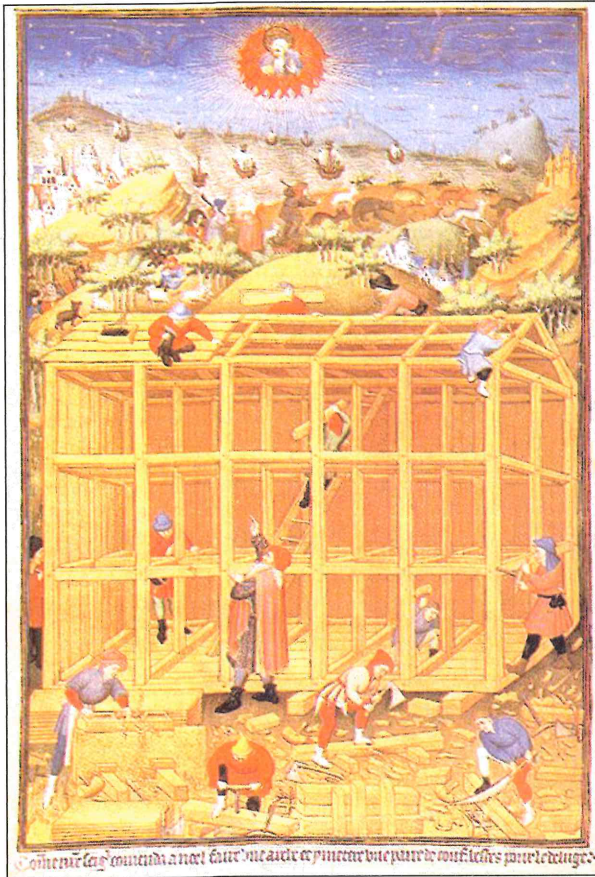
In Hebrew, “the men of renown” is literally “the men of *shem*,” the men of the “name”—which is what the word “shem” means. They were wicked tyrants who were making a name for themselves. As the lines of Seth and Cain intermarried, the whole world came to be dominated by the descendants of Lamech—unjust,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

The Flood

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



With the lines of Cain and Seth mixed up, 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 group left: Noah, his wife, his three sons, and their families. “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 safe, 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’ll 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 days,⁶ 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 “went to and fro until the waters were dried up from 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 leaf. 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.

Did The Flood Really Happen? No

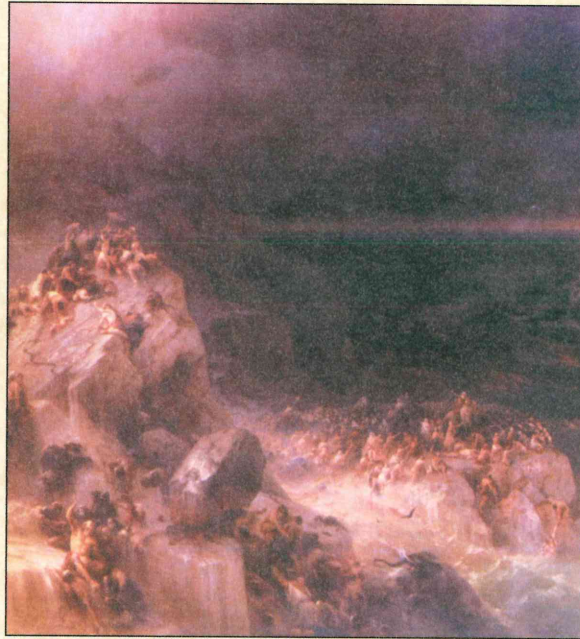
For a long time, Bible scholars tried to prove that there had been a flood over the whole earth, while scientists simply ignored the Bible story. But more recently, scientists and Bible scholars have been coming closer to agreement. Many geologists and archaeologists now think that the story of the Flood 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 carried 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 of 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 literal sense of the Bible. The Hebrew word translated as “world” in the Flood story could also mean “country,” 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 “Urartu” from the Hebrew Torah written by Moses which only included the consonants “rrt.”

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 founder. 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 it. “For your lifeblood I will surely require a reckoning; of every beast I will require it and of man; of 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.

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 won’t hold water. The story of Noah in its present form was written down later, that’s 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 family. He tells Utanapishtim, the man who takes the place of Noah in the story, to build a boat, and to gather all 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 like dogs.

After seven days, the storm subsides, and the boat comes to rest on a mountain. To see if there’s 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 doesn’t 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 doesn’t have the same point 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 can’t 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.



Above inset: A relief traditionally identified with the ancient King Gilgamesh of Uruk; from the palace of Sargon II, ca. 720 B.C.

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, 7th century B.C.

The Curse On Canaan

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

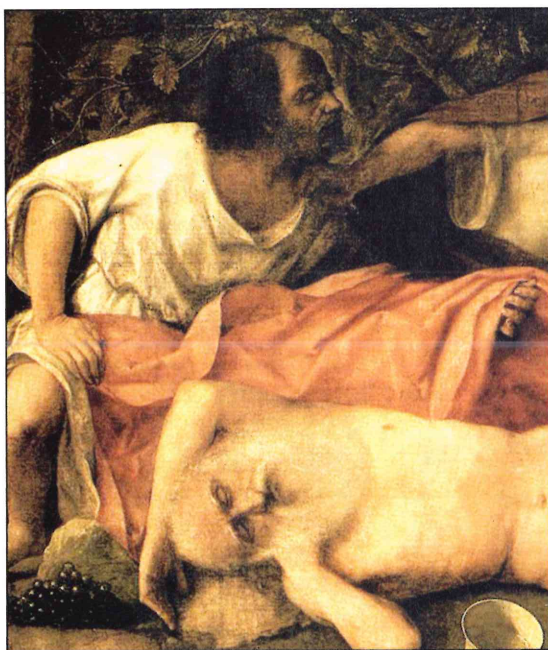
Once the flood waters receded, Noah and his family had to start from the beginning. They had to find food for themselves and their animals. Noah became a farmer, and one of his crops was grape vines. At harvest time, he made wine from the juice of the grapes. In Genesis 9: 20-27, we read the result of 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 are all descendants of Adam; they carry 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 first-born son didn't succumb to pride and end up being passed over in favor of his younger brother. (The other case would be Abraham.)

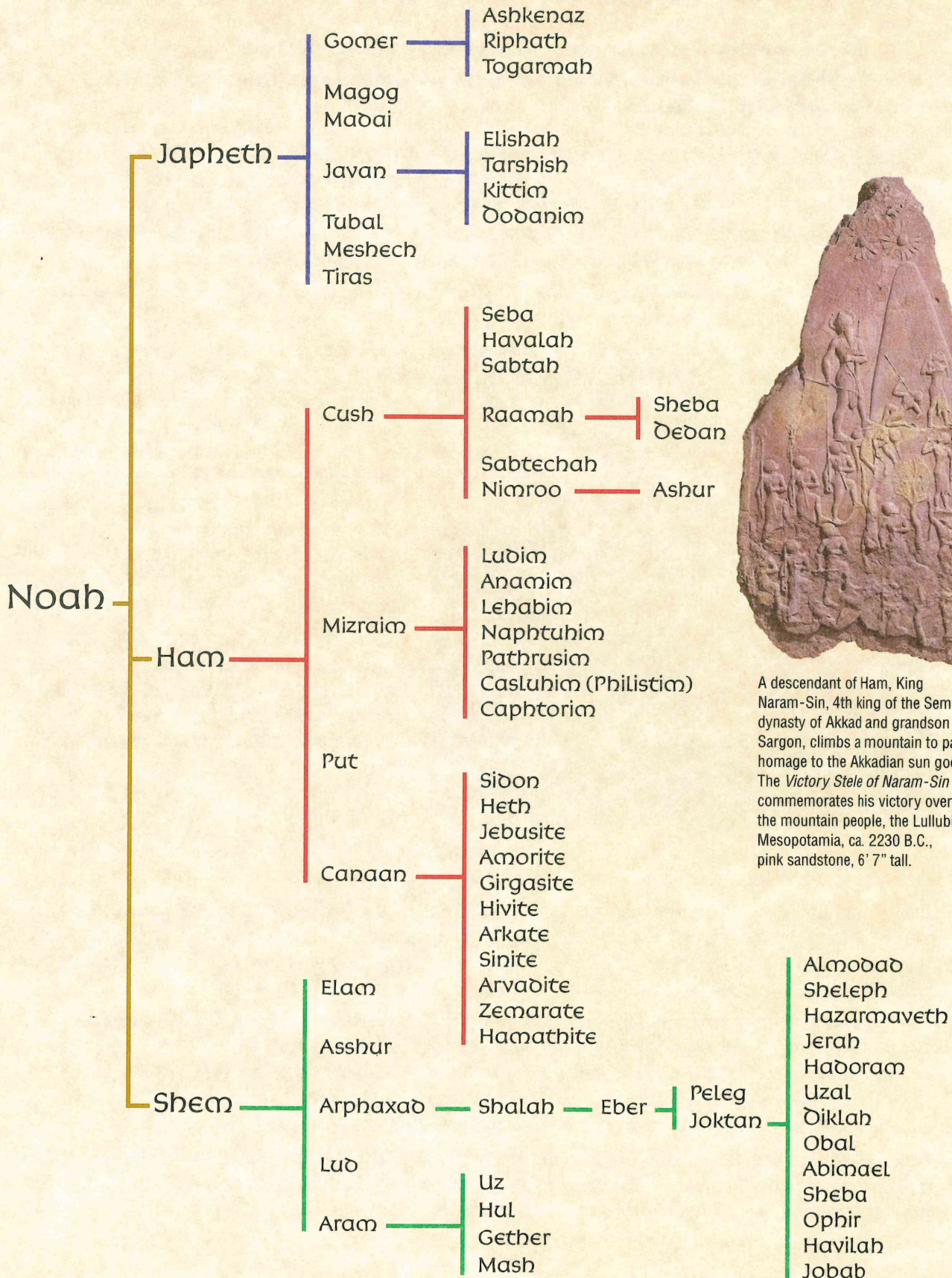
The role of the first-born is always very important in a patriarchal society. When the family is the main unit of society and the father is the leader of the family, what happens when the father dies? Human mortality would create a crisis of leadership in every generation. The first-born is the natural 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 is the preference for a younger son as heir instead of the first-born. It starts 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 first-born sons in Genesis who follow 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

TABLE OF NATIONS according to Genesis 10



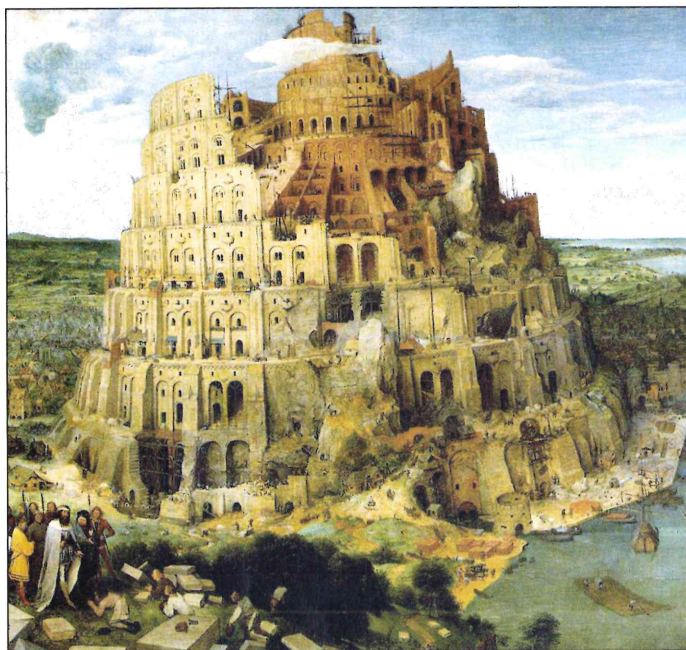
A descendant of Ham, King Naram-Sin, 4th king of the Semite dynasty of Akkad and grandson of Sargon, climbs a mountain to pay homage to the Akkadian sun god. The *Victory Stele of Naram-Sin* commemorates his victory over the mountain people, the Lullubi. Mesopotamia, ca. 2230 B.C., pink sandstone, 6' 7" tall.

The Arrogance Of The Children Of Ham

- All the Israelites' enemies are 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.



After the genealogies comes another of the most famous stories in Genesis—the story of the Tower of Babel. The descendants of Ham who settled in the Plain of Shinar (ancient Mesopotamia, which is modern Iraq) decided to make a name for themselves. “Come, let us build ourselves a city, and a tower with its top in the heavens, and let us make a name for ourselves, lest we be scattered abroad upon the face of the whole earth.”¹²

Again, that word “name” in Hebrew is “shem.” The Hamites are saying they intend to make a “shem” for themselves. In other words, they’re rebelling against the covenant authority of Shem, the first-born son of Noah. The tower-builders think they can reach heaven by themselves, without following God’s way.

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 couldn’t 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: 18-25). (CCC 57)

Meanwhile, the people of Shem went on worshiping 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

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.

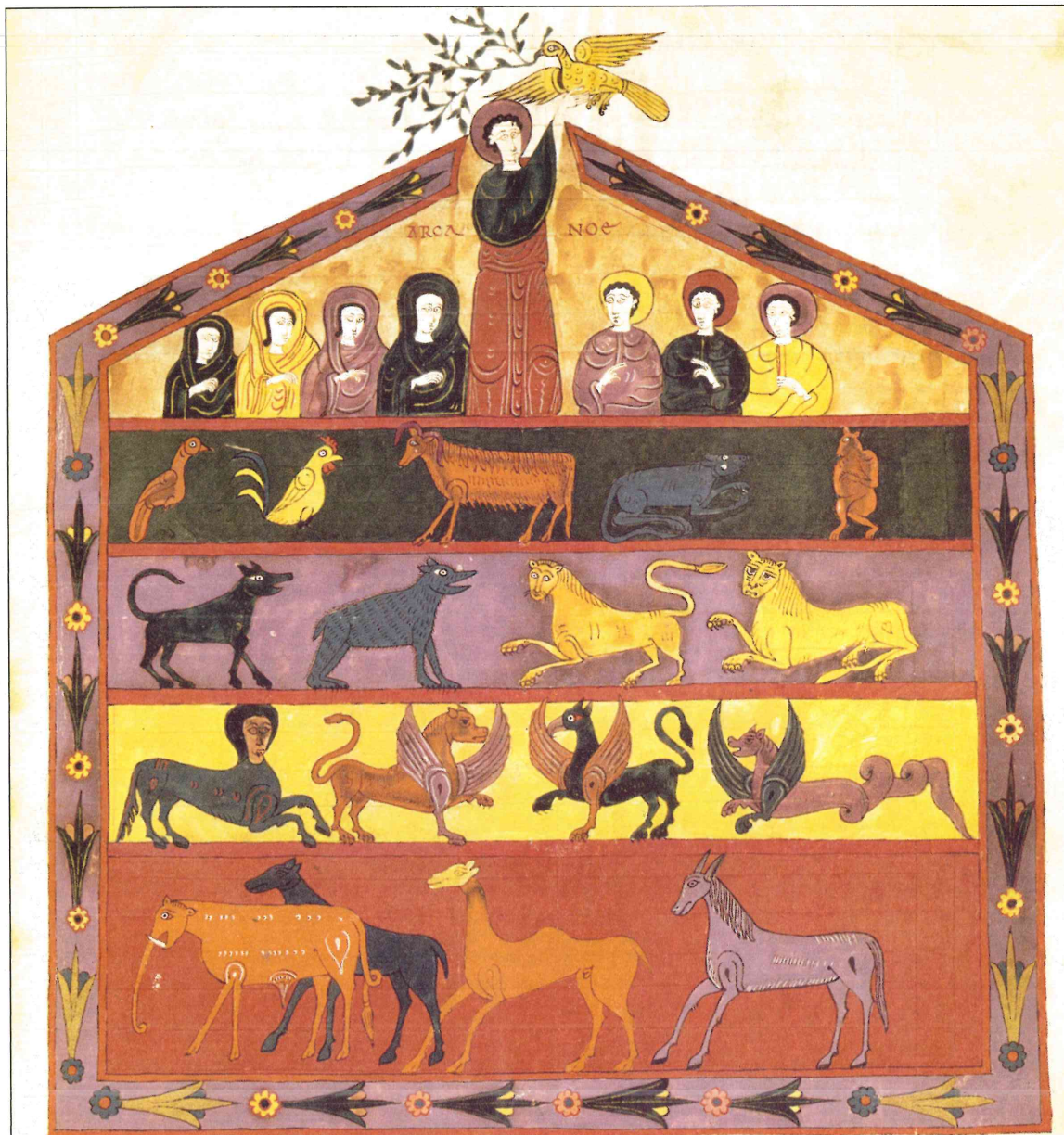
In fact, the ziggurats were so important to their religion that, in Mesopotamian mythology, the cities and their ziggurats existed before human beings were created.

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 B.C.



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



nohe requis appellatur sicua
 et puer ipse lumen et quam nūm
 et imponere et prophetia
 hic ipse faciat nos requiescere
 ab operibus nostris et mōtoribus manum
 nostram aemulū a.

dñe vaxo nohe in omni terra
 solus luetur inuenerat ea .
 secunetur in euacuclimo aque
 potumatis ipse solus quam
 domo sua subuenerat qua
 solus dñm tibi hāre ubando fecerat

"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)

SUPPLEMENTARY READING

Second Vatican Council: *Dei Verbum*

CHAPTER IV: THE OLD TESTAMENT

14. In carefully planning and preparing the salvation of the whole human race the God of infinite love, by a special dispensation, chose for himself a people to whom He would entrust his promises. First he entered into a covenant with Abraham (see Gn 15:18) and, through Moses, with the people of Israel (see Ex 24:8). To this people which he had acquired for himself, he so manifested himself through words and deeds as the one true and living God that Israel came to know by experience the ways of God with men. Then too, when God himself spoke to them through the mouth of the prophets, Israel daily gained a deeper and clearer understanding of his ways and made them more widely known among the nations (see Ps 21:29; 95:1-3; Is 2:1-5; Jer 3:17). The plan of salvation foretold by the sacred authors, recounted and explained by them, is found as the true word of God in the books of the Old Testament: these books, therefore, written under divine inspiration, remain permanently valuable. "For all that was written for our instruction, so that by steadfastness and the encouragement of the Scriptures we might have hope" (Rom 15:4).

15. The principal purpose to which the plan of the old covenant was directed was to prepare for the coming of Christ, the Redeemer of all

and of the messianic kingdom, to announce this coming by prophecy (see Lk 24:44; Jn 5:39; 1 Pt 1:10), and to indicate its meaning through various types (see 1 Cor 10:12). Now the books of the Old Testament, in accordance with the state of mankind before the time of salvation established by Christ, reveal to all men the knowledge of God and of man and the ways in which God, just and merciful, deals with men. These books, though they also contain some things which are incomplete and temporary, nevertheless show us true divine pedagogy. These same books, then, give expression to a lively sense of God, contain a store of sublime teachings about God, sound wisdom about human life, and a wonderful treasury of prayers, and in them the mystery of our salvation is present in a hidden way. Christians should receive them with reverence.

16. God, the inspirer and author of both Testaments, wisely arranged that the New Testament be hidden in the Old and the Old be made manifest in the New. For, though Christ established the new covenant in his blood (see Lk 22:20; 1 Cor 11:25), still the books of the Old Testament with all their parts, caught up into the proclamation of the Gospel, acquire and show forth their full meaning in the New Testament (see Mt 5:17; Lk 24:27; Rom 16:25-26; 2 Cor 14:16) and in turn shed light on it and explain it.



*"Then Noah built an altar to the Lord, ... and offered burnt offerings on the altar."
(Gn 8:20)*

VOCABULARY

ABEL

Adam and Eve's second son. Murdered by his brother Cain.

ARK

The large ship built by Noah to save his family and two of every animal from the Flood.

The box (Ark of the Covenant) in which the Ten Commandments were kept.

BABEL, TOWER OF

A tall building proposed by the Hamites in order to "make a name for themselves." God responded to their challenge by confusing their languages, so the project could never be completed.

BIGAMY

Being married to more than one person at the same time. A perversion of the marriage covenant.

CAIN

Adam and Eve's first son. The first murderer. His descendants carried a line of evil in contrast to the descendants of Seth, the People of God.

FLOOD

The destruction of the world by water, from which only Noah, his family, and the animals escaped. The Flood is a type of baptism, through which sin is destroyed.

HAM

Noah's rebellious son. The ancestor of Israel's enemies.

LAMECH

A descendant of Cain. The first bigamist. His revenge demonstrates how far evil had developed in the world.

NOAH

The righteous man who, with his family and the animals, survived the Flood.

PARALLELISM

A literary technique in which similarities between events or terms is used to point out similarities of ideas.

POLYGAMY

The practice of having multiple wives. A perversion of the marriage covenant. Polygamy always leads to evil consequences in Scripture.

SETH

Adam and Eve's third son and eventual heir. His line carried on the true worship of God in contrast to the evil line of Cain.

SHEM

Noah's first-born son and heir. Ancestor of the Israelites and related tribes. Hebrew for "name."

SHINAR, PLAIN OF

Mesopotamia, or modern Iraq; the land settled by the descendants of Ham.



And God said, "This is the sign of the covenant which I make between me and you and every living creature that is with you, ... I set my bow in the cloud,..."
 (Gn 9: 12-13)

STUDY QUESTIONS

1. Where does Cain go after his banishment?
2. Who is Lamech?
3. Who is the first bigamist mentioned in Scripture?
4. How did the descendants of Cain differ from those of Seth?
5. What was the downfall of the descendants of Seth?
6. In Genesis 6, who were the “sons of God”?
7. In Genesis 6, who were the “daughters of men”?
8. Why did God shorten the lives of men?
9. During this period, whose family remained righteous?
10. What was the sign of the rainbow?
11. How long did the rain last during the Flood?
12. What was the first thing that Noah did when he got off the ark?
13. How is the flood considered a precursor of Baptism?
14. What is Ham’s sin?
15. Who are Ham’s descendants?
16. Who are the descendants of Shem?
17. Why are Ham’s descendants punished when they try to build the Tower of Babel?
18. How does God punish the tower builders?
19. What does Babylon symbolize?

PRACTICAL EXERCISES

1. Chapter three ended with Cain murdering Abel because of envy. As punishment, Cain was banished from the land and his descendants were caught up in sin and violence. Explain why Cain and his descendants were punished so harshly for the murder he committed. Do people today still value life the way that God wants them to? How does this topic tie into abortion or euthanasia?
2. Many inventions that make civilization possible have been attributed to Cain’s line and held in disdain because of the evil that has come from them. How do you feel about the use of technology for civilization? What are some of the risks and benefits of technology?

Finally, what are some good and some bad effects that have come from inventions such as television, the internet, or video games?

3. The Flood was a punishment for the chosen people because they had turned away from God. God decided, however, to also use the Flood as a means to save mankind. In order to do this, he made a covenant with Noah as he had done with Adam. Look back to chapter two and read about God’s covenant with Adam. How was that covenant similar to the covenant God made with Noah? List as many similarities as you can. What are the differences?

FROM THE CATECHISM

56 After the unity of the human race was shattered by sin God at once sought to save humanity part by part. The covenant with Noah after the Flood gives expression to the principle of the divine economy toward the “nations,” in other words, towards men grouped “in their lands, each with [its] own language, by their families, in their nations” (Gn 10: 5; cf. 9: 9-10, 16; 10: 20-31).

701 *The dove.* At the end of the Flood, whose symbolism refers to Baptism, a dove released by Noah returns with a fresh olive-tree branch in its beak as a sign that the earth was again habitable (cf. Gn 8: 8-12). When Christ comes up from the water of his baptism, the Holy Spirit, in the form of a dove, comes down upon him and remains with him (cf. Mt 3: 16 and parallels). The Spirit comes down and remains in the purified hearts of the baptized. In certain churches, the Eucharist is reserved in a metal receptacle in the form of a dove (*columbarium*) suspended above the altar. Christian iconography traditionally uses a dove to suggest the Spirit.

845 To reunite all his children, scattered and led astray by sin, the Father willed to call the whole of humanity together into his Son’s Church. The Church is the place where humanity must rediscover its unity and salvation. The Church is “the world reconciled.” She is that bark which “in the full sail of the Lord’s cross, by the breath of the Holy Spirit, navigates safely in this world.” According to another image dear to the Church Fathers, she is prefigured by Noah’s

ark, which alone saves from the Flood (St. Augustine, *Serm.* 96, 7, 9: PL 38, 588; St. Ambrose, *De virg.* 18, 118: PL 16, 297B; cf. already 1 Pt 3: 20-21).

1664 Unity, indissolubility, and openness to fertility are essential to marriage. Polygamy is incompatible with the unity of marriage; divorce separates what God has joined together; the refusal of fertility turns married life away from its “supreme gift,” the child (GS 50 § 1).

2259 In the account of Abel’s murder by his brother Cain (cf. Gn 4: 8-12), Scripture reveals the presence of anger and envy in man, consequences of original sin, from the beginning of human history. Man has become the enemy of his fellow man. God declares the wickedness of this fratricide: “What have you done? The voice of your brother’s blood is crying to me from the ground. And now you are cursed from the ground, which has opened its mouth to receive your brother’s blood from your hand” (Gn 4: 10-11).

Endnotes

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| 1. Gn 4: 21. | 7. Gn 8: 3-4. |
| 2. Gn 5: 3. | 8. Gn 8: 6-12. |
| 3. Gn 6: 1-4. | 9. Gn 9: 1. |
| 4. Gn 6: 11. | 10. Gn 9: 20-22. |
| 5. Gn 7: 2-3. | 11. Gn 9: 23-27. |
| 6. Gn 7: 24. | 12. Gn 11: 4. |



“...Cain brought to the Lord an offering of the fruit of the ground, and Abel brought of the firstlings of his flock...” (Gn 4: 3-4)