

## **From the Flood to Abraham**

*Genesis 9-11*

### **God's Covenant with Noah and His Sons**

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We continue with the history of Noah.

That which God had determined at the time of Noah's offering (8:21), He revealed in detail to Noah and his sons. Also to the three sons who would appear as ancestors of the following generations (see below), since it concerns all of mankind. This is what God did when He established the covenant, about which we will speak presently.

But first He *blessed* Noah and his sons.

It was essentially the same blessing which He spoke at the creation (1:28, 29, see outline 2), but with a few changes which had become necessary due to sin. Regarding the relationship with the *animals*, the harmony had been disturbed. Because of the sinking into savagery, danger threatens man, and the meek subjection to his dominion no longer exists among the animals. For this reason God has put the fear and dread of man into them. As a rule animals shy away from man; even the wild animals withdraw from areas where people build their homes.

With respect to *nourishment*, God gave also the meat of animals and the green herbs for food. Since after the fall into sin animals were allowed to be killed in order to make clothing from the skins, and for sacrifices, they were also allowed to be eaten. Whether this was done already *before* the flood is not recorded by the Scriptures.

God makes one restriction here, namely, with regard to the *blood*, whereby the life (soul) flows away. This may not be eaten, but must be poured out. And in this connection God protects *human* blood, which may not be poured out by man or beast upon pain of death. God reserves the right regarding the disposal of human and animal blood to Himself. The blood stream of human life must continue; the blood of animals He retains for Himself, and it receives in Israel a special destiny with an eye to Christ.

For according to God's image He made man (verse 6b). This refers to all of the preceding, not merely to verse 6a. By the above-mentioned blessing God maintains life on earth, and He regulates it in spite of sin. God once created man as His image and He works toward the restoration through Christ.

Then follows in 9:8-17 the establishing of the *covenant*. This is with all that lives to the far distant offspring of man and animal; with us also, and it contains the promise, without expressing a demand for faith, that never again will God destroy the earth by a flood. With this God gave the rainbow for a sign. Every time that God sees that rainbow He will be reminded that He will no more destroy the earth with a flood. And how often do we think of it?

### **Noah's Prophecy**

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The history of Noah ends with the tale of his drunkenness, the sin of Ham, and the prophecy regarding the breakthrough of salvation in Shem's generation.

The story of Noah's drunkenness should be dated many years after the flood since Ham's son Canaan (probably the youngest of Ham's sons, 10:6) was already a man, or at least a youth. Noah devoted himself to farming after the flood. Later he turned to wine growing. He appears to have been the "discoverer" of the vine, which is believed to have originated in the Armenian highlands. Thus he became the founder of the wine culture. The Scriptures tell us that when he (probably during the beginning of his experimenting) drank of the wine, the fermented grape juice went to his head so that he became drunk and foolish, undressed himself in his tent, and in this way slept off his stupor. We get the impression that the

drunkenness was by no means light. We probably should not assume that he was a habitual drunkard, but that he became drunk through ignorance; which does not excuse him, however: while testing he gave himself over completely to the intoxicating enjoyment. When Ham discovered him in this situation, he certainly did not show the required reverence toward his father. This also applies to what he told his brothers outside the tent. The contrast between his attitude and that of his brothers, as it is sharply outlined, justifies the remark that a base, unchaste disposition revealed itself in Ham. What a difference with Shem and Japheth, who, with faces averted, covered their father with a garment.

When Noah awakened and heard what his youngest son had “done to him” (which is the least to be said of mockery and insult), he cursed Canaan, Ham’s youngest son, on the other hand blessing Shem and Japheth: “Cursed be Canaan, a slave of slaves shall he be to his brothers .... Blessed by the LORD my God be Shem; and let Canaan be his slave. God enlarge Japheth, and let him dwell in the tents of Shem; and let Canaan be his slave.”

In these words we have to see the *prophecy* regarding the destiny which would befall them in their descendants. These words therefore come from the Spirit of prophecy, which moved Noah, just shortly after his awakening, and we have to see that moment as God’s time; doubtless that is a connection between the one and the other (see later).

The fact that Canaan’s descendants would have an inferior position among their brother nations, and also over against the posterity of Shem and Japheth, should, of course, not be understood in the sense that they would be subjected to all those nations. Here a general thought is expressed. The peoples who descended from Canaan and who lived in the country of the same name (10:15-19) were small in size, and possessed no high cultural development or historical significance; moreover, they were often brought under subjection by nations out of the East and South. Before Israel’s entry they had, as appears from excavations, been subjected for a long time by Egypt; they were partly destroyed by Israel and the remnant became slaves (Joshua 9:27); during the time of the judges some of them suffered occasionally from Egypt; from Solomon’s time on all of

them had to pay tribute, and this remained so until the time of the exile (2 Chronicles 8:7, 8).

It is remarkable that not Ham, but Canaan was cursed, although this also contains an element of punishment for the father. We have to see this in the light of 9:18 and 22, where Ham is indicated as “the father of Canaan.” Here the father is identified with reference to the son, not the son with reference to the father. The saying “he takes after his father” does not apply here; it was the son in this case who was the example which exerted an influence upon the father. We may call Canaan the perverted rogue of the family, who had a bad influence on his father. And as Canaan was, so was his posterity. Because of their iniquity God destroyed them out of the midst of the nations, or subjected and dispersed them, and burned Sodom and other cities from off the earth.

But Noah praised the LORD the God of Shem, from whom are all blessings, of which Shem so richly received a part. And Japheth’s posterity increased and was allowed to share in Shem’s blessing. Although the future was still very hazy for Noah because of the far distant time, yet it is unmistakably revealed here to us that the seed of the woman would come from the descendants of Shem.

Finally we should discuss the question *for what purpose* the extreme drunkenness of this man of God had to be mentioned, and why in this connection the coming Christ is indicated.

We shall have to regard this in connection with Noah’s significance, which he had as the by God appointed saviour, who in the ark built by himself brought the life of creation from the old earth through the world judgment to the new, cleansed earth . . . where he stumbled over the wine which gladdens the heart. We think in this regard of the Lord Christ, the Saviour of the world, who will lead us through the final world judgment to a new earth, where He shall drink the wine new in the kingdom of God (Matthew 26:29).

Noah was unable to be the true saviour. The prophecy of his father Lamech was not fulfilled in him. Noah’s history ends with the prophecy

regarding Him Who is greater than Noah. And what else Noah did in his life is no longer of importance; he died at the age of 950.

This is the end of his “toledoth.”

### **The History of Noah’s Sons**

Now follows the history of Noah’s sons, Shem, Ham, and Japheth, in chapter 10:1-11:19. Sons were born also to them and so history continued. Yet now it is no longer in the name of Noah; his sons are named as tribal heads. Noah’s significance was connected with the flood, not with the increase in population after the flood. The Scriptures do not mention two ancestors-and-heads, one at the creation and one after the flood; they maintain the exclusive position of Adam as only ancestor and head of all mankind, and thus also the unity of the human race (Acts 17:26).

There is not much narrative material to relate in this part.

- a) First of all we see in the seventy names of persons and nations (symbolic number!) the building up of the human race insofar as it lived after the flood. “From these the nations spread abroad on the earth after the flood.”
- b) Mention is made of Nimrod, descending from the Cushites, and thus a descendant of Ham. He was a mighty hunter before God’s watchful eye, who as a hero in the fight (with people? and/or wild animals?) became a chief of the people and established a kingdom (*power establishment*) out of four neighbouring cities in the plain of Shinar (Babylon), and from there went to Assyria (10:11) where he built four more such cities with Nineveh as the centre (*power expansion*). Through this briefly mentioned tendency the world’s development is typified as a continuing process of the will to power. How often did not the vigilant God intervene in order to destroy the horns of the mighty! And in this way to keep the way open for the course of His own kingdom! It was not so very long yet after the flood (compared to the number of following centuries), and yet the cleansed earth was already the arena of Satan once more, and it began under the leadership of a “son” of Ham.

- c) Finally it is related in what manner the division among the people and their dispersion came about. The author places us in the time wherein mankind began to increase more and more, undoubtedly some centuries after the flood. The people still lived in Armenia, probably on the highlands where the grape vines grow. Was overpopulation a reason that another home was sought, or were there different motives? The Scriptures relate only that a great journey was undertaken towards the east (according to the Dutch; *from* the east according to AV and RSV) and that the people settled in the land of Shinar, a very fertile area.

It was generally agreed that a city should be built with a tower which was to rise high into the sky and could thus be seen from a great distance. The aim was to establish a name for themselves by means of that great building, and so to have a common point to prevent that they would wander away from each other and cease to remain one nation living together. It was the well-known desire for concentration, which is opposed to the commandment of the LORD to populate the *earth*. But the LORD came down to behold the city and tower which were being built and whose completion was very well possible with clay and loam, now that the people were one, with one language. And so, according to His purpose, God confused their language, thereby driving them apart and dispersing them over the earth. For this reason that city was called Babel. In accordance with His order of creation God drove the people apart so that the nations, each with their own history, character, language, and development would populate the earth, *and* gradually become estranged from each other. Because of sin this caused also strife among each other. However, we should first of all take notice of God's grace when He breaks up the unity-in-sin to keep the way open for the coming of the Redeemer and for the course of the gospel unto true unity in Him. External unity in a sinful world blocks the progress of His kingdom.

Spiritual unity was worked by the Holy Spirit at His coming, to place His people on the road which leads to the perfect unity (John 17:20-23), such as will exist one day before the eyes of the world on the day of Christ's future, when there will be the one flock under the one Shepherd (Philippians 2:10, 11).

Also this part is being denied today, as indeed present-day Bible criticism rejects all the first 11 chapters of Genesis. As the most important objections are mentioned: in the first place that the languages came only *gradually* into being and must have developed out of each other, namely, in so far as they originated from the same mankind, since these critics believe in more than one origin of man; and further that (with an eye to the latter theory) one cannot believe in an *original unity* of *language*. It is also suggested (for example, by newer Roman theologians) that reference is made here only to that part of mankind which in Noah was rescued from a flood which took place in only a small area. We clearly see that nowadays people base their ideas on evolution theories regarding origin, history, language development, religion, etc. And such evolution theories, which dominate all thought, are a radical denial of the Word of the LORD.

### **The History of Shem**

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We find the history of Shem in 11:10-26.

The world of that time sank down into heathendom, but God's promise remained. The prophecy of Noah would receive its fulfilment, not in the power state of Ham's descendant or any other, but in the generation of Shem: "Blessed be the LORD, the God of *Shem*."

There is not much of a story to relate here. It is a list of ten names from *Shem to Abram*. Also in chapter 10 the name of Shem was mentioned with many descendants; there he was indicated as co-builder of the human race. Here, however, he is named as forefather of Abram, out of whom is the church, the seed of Abraham, and Christ, Who was before Abraham.

It may be accepted as quite certain that the time from Shem to Abram was longer than the 292 years which one gets by adding the figures from birth to birth. As happens later, names were probably omitted here also. Compare the list of names in Matthew 1, where it says in verse 8: "Joram begat Uzzia," while actually there had been three kings between those two, namely, Ahaziah, Joash, and Amaziah. The reason for this is not known. It is assumed that something similar happened also in the list of Genesis 11.

The names of the persons listed are thought to have been those of the “recorders,” that is, of those who from generation to generation had passed on the sacred history since the time of paradise. Thereby it is to be accepted that their memory was aided by the Holy Spirit so that this history would not be corrupted as was the case with that of the Babylonians, for example, but that the God-fearing people before Moses might also know God’s promises and mighty deeds, as well as His will. This idea is acceptable, although it is not specifically mentioned.

### **Questions**

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1. Is Genesis 9:6 still relevant today? If so, in all cases? Compare Exodus 21:13; 21:23, Deuteronomy 19:5.
2. What is the significance of the covenant of Genesis 9 in connection with the coming of Christ?
3. Does the rainbow still have the same comforting power now that we know that the destruction of the world by fire is at hand?
4. Is the opinion correct that by the curse of Ham the negro nations are doomed to slavery?
6. Of what significance is the fact that mankind is a unity and Adam is only head?
7. Was the journey to Shinar (11:2) before or after the appearance of Nimrod (10:8ff.)?
8. Is it possible to say that through the miracle of Pentecost unity of language has been temporarily restored?
9. Do we find in the present day ecumenical movement an initial restoration of the spiritual unity of which John 17 speaks?