

In the Beginning: Genesis 1 to 25

Week 2

Monday, March 13th

Genesis 4:25-5:32

25Adam slept with his wife again, and she gave birth to another son. She named him Seth, for she said, "God has granted me another son in place of Abel, the one Cain killed."

26When Seth grew up, he had a son and named him Enosh. It was during his lifetime that people first began to worship the LORD.

1This is the history of the descendants of Adam. When God created people, he made them in the likeness of God. 2He created them male and female, and he blessed them and called them "human."

3When Adam was 130 years old, his son Seth was born, and Seth was the very image of his father. 4After the birth of Seth, Adam lived another 800 years, and he had other sons and daughters. 5He died at the age of 930.

6When Seth was 105 years old, his son Enosh was born. 7After the birth of Enosh, Seth lived another 807 years, and he had other sons and daughters. 8He died at the age of 912.

9When Enosh was 90 years old, his son Kenan was born. 10After the birth of Kenan, Enosh lived another 815 years, and he had other sons and daughters. 11He died at the age of 905.

12When Kenan was 70 years old, his son Mahalalel was born. 13After the birth of Mahalalel, Kenan lived another 840 years, and he had other sons and daughters. 14He died at the age of 910.

15When Mahalalel was 65 years old, his son Jared was born. 16After the birth of Jared, Mahalalel lived 830 years, and he had other sons and daughters. 17He died at the age of 895.

18When Jared was 162 years old, his son Enoch was born. 19After the birth of Enoch, Jared lived another 800 years, and he had other sons and daughters. 20He died at the age of 962.

21When Enoch was 65 years old, his son Methuselah was born. 22After the birth of Methuselah, Enoch lived another 300 years in close fellowship with God, and he had other sons and daughters. 23Enoch lived 365 years in all. 24He enjoyed a close relationship with God throughout his life. Then suddenly, he disappeared because God took him.

25When Methuselah was 187 years old, his son Lamech was born. 26After the birth of Lamech, Methuselah lived another 782 years, and he had other sons and daughters. 27He died at the age of 969.

28When Lamech was 182 years old, his son Noah was born. 29Lamech named his son Noah, for he said, "He will bring us relief from the painful labor of farming this ground that the LORD has cursed." 30After the birth of Noah, Lamech lived 595 years, and he had other sons and daughters. 31He died at the age of 777.

32By the time Noah was 500 years old, he had three sons: Shem, Ham, and Japheth.

Points of Interest:

- 'This is the history of the descendants of Adam'—our second genealogy. This one follows the line of Cain's brother Seth. We learn most from this list by contrasting it to Cain's. The first difference is where the genealogy begins: Cain's starts with Cain, but Seth's starts with Adam. Cain has left the family and started his own; Seth is continuing Adam's. In fact, the account of Seth's family begins with God himself: God is the father of Adam and Eve, who are in turn the parents of Seth. Seth and his descendents are the heirs of God; Cain's descendents are the heirs of Cain.

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- ‘people first began to worship the LORD’—this verse probably means that it was during Enosh’s time that people began to call God, ‘the LORD.’ By convention, God’s personal name Yahweh is usually represented by the phrase ‘the LORD’ (all capitals) as a sign of respect for God’s name. So, this verse is essentially saying, ‘It’s at this time that people started calling God by name.’ Here, we find another subtle but significant contrast between Cain’s family and Seth’s: Cain founds a city and gives it the name of his son; Seth’s family calls upon the name of God. Cain is pinning his hopes on his son, while Seth is pinning his hopes on God.
- ‘Seth was the very image of his father’—and Adam is the image of God. When people see Seth and his family, they notice a family resemblance with God himself. The inheritance Adam passes along to Seth is the image of God.
- ‘he had other sons and daughters’—Cain’s genealogy is almost exclusively a father-to-oldest-son list, but in every single generation of Seth’s genealogy we get this mention of ‘other sons and daughters.’ Meanwhile, while Cain’s genealogy mentions many significant accomplishments, Seth’s genealogy says almost nothing about what his family did. I’m sure that it’s not the case that Cain’s descendants only have one-child families, nor that Seth’s family is completely unaccomplished. But Moses seems to be making a point. Human beings were given two commissions: to subdue the earth, and to multiply and fill it. Doing these two things is their way of imitating God and of participating in his work of bringing shape and abundance to the empty chaos that existed before creation. Since the eating of the fruit, humanity has been handicapped in its ability to pursue this two-sided mission: Cain’s family is good at subduing the earth; Seth’s family is good at multiplying and filling the earth; but neither family can do both. Although both families still bear the marks of having been created to be like God, their ability to reflect him fully has been fractured. This is even the case for Seth’s family, despite their closer relationship to God.
- ‘He died at the age of 930’—obviously, the longevity of these people is a bit incredible. While we have little anthropological or biological evidence that people used to be longer-lived (the scientific evidence tends to go in the other direction), it’s worth noting that it’s a pretty common feature of the mythologies of ancient cultures. In fact, it’s one aspect of a pretty major worldview difference between modern Westerners and almost every other world culture. We modern Westerners tend to have a progressive worldview: we think of the world as steadily improving all of the time. In contrast, the majority of other world cultures, past and present, talk of us being the lesser descendants of a previous Golden Age. It’s a thought-provoking difference. While we’ve clearly seen tremendous advances in science and technology over the course of human civilization, the question, ‘Are things really getting better and better?’ does seem to be worth asking.

Of course, that doesn’t address the specific issue of human longevity. In that regard, it is, I think, worth noticing that Moses doesn’t necessarily say that **all** of humanity was long-lived: he doesn’t mention the ages of Cain’s descendants, or even of the ‘other sons and daughters’ of Seth. It’s only the primary heirs of Seth who are specifically said to have these extremely long lives. I wonder if, whether actually or metaphorically, these long lives are vestiges of the unending life Adam and Eve were meant to experience before they were cast out of the garden of Eden. Perhaps Seth and his family, as the direct heirs of God’s image and as the family who stayed close to the presence of God, has some lasting effect of long life.

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- 'enjoyed a close relationship with God throughout his life'—there are two names that are found in both genealogies: Enoch and Lamech. I think we're meant to contrast these homonymous cousins. In the case of the Enochs, Cain's Enoch is the son Cain had after he moved away from the presence of God, whereas Seth's Enoch is the best example we have of someone enjoying a wonderful, close relationship with God. Ever since Adam and Eve ate the fruit, we've seen a trajectory of people getting farther and farther from God's presence. We see in Seth's Enoch that this trajectory is not inevitable. He apparently gets ushered directly into the presence of God, never experiencing the death that has been the eventual, unavoidable result of Adam and Eve's rebellion.
- 'named his son Noah'—Noah means, 'relief.'
- He will bring us relief from the painful labor of farming this ground that the LORD has cursed'—Cain's Lamech boasts of his ability to take care of himself—mostly by means of extraordinary violence; Seth's Lamech looks forward with hope to the time when God will provide people once again with a better life.

Taking it home:

- *For you and your family:* In Seth's family, we see a heritage of long life and of intimacy with God. What's the good heritage you've received from your family? Consider taking a moment to thank God for that good legacy. If you have children, what family heritage would you like to pass along to them? Ask God to give you the ability to do so.
- *For our church:* Pray that our church would have the blessing of Enoch: that we would experience a delightful closeness with God, and that we would be a living testimonial to the fact that such delightful closeness is still possible, even in the midst of a broken world.
- *For our city:* Lamech is so confident in God's grace and mercy on humanity that he's willing to name his son after a specific hope he has. What are some specific hopes you have for our city? Pray in confidence that God would bring those hopes to pass.

Tuesday, March 14th

Genesis 6

1When the human population began to grow rapidly on the earth, 2the sons of God saw the beautiful women of the human race and took any they wanted as their wives. 3Then the LORD said, "My Spirit will not put up with humans for such a long time, for they are only mortal flesh. In the future, they will live no more than 120 years."

4In those days, and even afterward, giants lived on the earth, for whenever the sons of God had intercourse with human women, they gave birth to children who became the heroes mentioned in legends of old.

5Now the LORD observed the extent of the people's wickedness, and he saw that all their thoughts were consistently and totally evil. 6So the LORD was sorry he had ever made them. It broke his heart. 7And the LORD said, "I will completely wipe out this human race that I have created. Yes, and I will destroy all the animals and birds, too. I am sorry I ever made them." 8But Noah found favor with the LORD.

9This is the history of Noah and his family. Noah was a righteous man, the only blameless man living on earth at the time. He consistently followed God's will and enjoyed a close relationship with him. 10Noah had three sons: Shem, Ham, and Japheth.

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11Now the earth had become corrupt in God's sight, and it was filled with violence. 12God observed all this corruption in the world, and he saw violence and depravity everywhere. 13So God said to Noah, "I have decided to destroy all living creatures, for the earth is filled with violence because of them. Yes, I will wipe them all from the face of the earth!

14"Make a boat from resinous wood and seal it with tar, inside and out. Then construct decks and stalls throughout its interior. 15Make it 450 feet long, 75 feet wide, and 45 feet high. 16Construct an opening all the way around the boat, 18 inches below the roof. Then put three decks inside the boat--bottom, middle, and upper--and put a door in the side.

17"Look! I am about to cover the earth with a flood that will destroy every living thing. Everything on earth will die! 18But I solemnly swear to keep you safe in the boat, with your wife and your sons and their wives. 19Bring a pair of every kind of animal--a male and a female--into the boat with you to keep them alive during the flood. 20Pairs of each kind of bird and each kind of animal, large and small alike, will come to you to be kept alive. 21And remember, take enough food for your family and for all the animals."

22So Noah did everything exactly as God had commanded him.

Points of Interest:

- the sons of God saw the beautiful women of the human race and took any they wanted'—what exactly is happening here is another one of the unsolvable mysteries of Genesis. Most biblical interpreters think that these 'sons of God' are angelic beings; that's usually what seems to be intended when the phrase is used in the Bible, and it fits with the fact that the children of these marriages were great heroes. Besides simply sounding a little weird, there are to my mind a couple of problems with this theory:
 1. Jesus tells us later that angels don't marry (Mark 12:25)—then again, the fact that they don't marry doesn't necessarily mean that they can't. So, this may or may not be a strong problem with the angel theory;
 2. It's the human beings who are punished—here's my bigger problem with the idea that these 'sons of God' are angels. If rebellious angels are essentially stealing human women, why are the human beings, and not the angels, punished?

Here's my own private theory: the sons of God are the descendents of Seth, and the women of the human race are descendents of Cain. I don't get much scholarly support, but I personally think that it works pretty well with the story that Moses has been telling us. What our version translates as 'women of the human race' is more precisely, 'daughters of men' (the admirable pursuit of gender inclusivity obscures the parallelism of 'sons of God' and 'daughters of men'). Remember that Seth's line starts with God, but Cain's starts with Cain himself, a man. So, in the past two chapters, we've been introduced to two families: the family of God, and the family of humanity. Also, we've been introduced to the idea that human nature has two sources, God and dust. In Hebrew, the word for 'man' is related to the word for 'dust' or 'earth.' I think Moses has been telling us that Seth's family most reflects humanity's divine nature, and Cain's family most reflects humanity's earthly nature; to put it crudely, there is a family of God and a family of dust. In this chapter, the two families start to intermarry, and it hastens the decline of humanity into sin and unhappiness.

Whether or not I'm right about that, what is clear in this passage is that we have a new decision toward rebellion. Just like Eve trusted her own senses rather than God's warning about the fruit and took what she wanted, these sons of God (whoever they

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are) trust their own senses and take what they want. The result in both cases is a leap forward in wickedness and misery.

- ‘they will live no more than 120 years’—God might be putting an upper cap on a person’s lifespan (one that comes close to our experience), or he might be predicting that within 120 years he will put a stop to human civilization. If it’s a cap on individual lifespan, it takes a while to take effect: we continue to get long-lived people through the life of Abraham.
- ‘their thoughts were consistently and totally evil’—humanity’s decision to be their own gods, to decide what is good and what is evil themselves, has produced only a multiplication of evil.
- ‘It broke his heart’—God’s response is not primarily anger or vengeance, but heart-brokenness.
- ‘the LORD was sorry he had ever made them’—we’ve gone from creation in general and humanity in particular being ‘excellent in every way’ to God completely regretting that he’d ever starting this project of creating the world. The human beings were supposed to be God’s partner in spreading goodness into what had been empty and chaotic. Instead, they end up working consistently against his purposes, undoing much of the good work he had done.
- ‘I will destroy all the animals and birds, too’—apparently, humanity’s failure has overflow effects on the rest of creation. Perhaps the imperfection we see in nature—and not just the direct results of pollution and misuse, but even natural disasters or the existence of universal pests like mosquitoes—can be attributed to the failure of human beings to take proper authority over creation. We were created to lead this whole world toward God’s goodness. Not only have we failed in that mission, but we have instead unleashed sin on the entire world.
- ‘But Noah found favor with the LORD’—it’s as if in the midst of formulating his plan of completely scrapping the world, God’s attention is caught by this one man. The existence of this one man causes God to at least modify his plan. Though it doesn’t stop God from judging the earth, Noah’s faithfulness gives God reason to try again.
- ‘it was filled with violence’—rather than being filled with God’s goodness and abundance, as he had intended.
- ‘I am about to cover the earth with a flood’—God’s judgment essentially rolls back creation to an earlier stage of creation. It’s like a small return to the original empty, dark, wet chaos. We go back to the time before the earth was filled and before the dry land was separated from the sea. In one way of looking at things, God completes the destructive work that humanity had gotten rolling.
- ‘a flood that will destroy every living thing’—similar to the issue of longevity, while there’s little agreed-upon archaeological or geological evidence of a universal flood at this point in human history, a cataclysmic flood wiping out an earlier civilization is a remarkably widespread feature of the mythology of cultures from all around the world. The prominence of these stories in such far-flung places as Scandinavia, China, and North and South America show that it’s not just a Near Eastern idea. A surprising number of these flood stories share common details: that the flood is a judgment of the gods; that a god warned one family ahead of time; that the flood happened during the age of the giants; that the boat landed on a mountain; that birds were sent out as scouts. (I found the Wikipedia entry on ‘Deluge’ particularly interesting and informative on this topic.)

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- 'Bring a pair of every kind of animal'—Noah takes up the responsibility for all living things that God gave to humanity in chapter one.

Taking it home:

- *For you and your family:* God will not let evil go on forever. That prospect is both unbelievably frightening and profoundly reassuring. Are there things about this world that disturb you? Things that are very wrong, but just keep happening? In faith, thank God that those things won't be allowed to continue forever. Pray also for mercy for from God for yourself, your family, and our world. Pray that God would rescue us from evil and its effects.
- *For our church:* Pray that we as a church would be a community which trusts God's leading, rather than our own minds and senses.
- *For our city:* Living in the city, nature isn't a huge part of our daily life. Nonetheless, there is water, and air, and plant life, and animal life. We not only share this city with them, but we were given responsibility for them. Pray that God would forgive us as a city for our failures to take proper care of nature. Pray that he would give us the ability to become good stewards of our natural environment. And ask him to bring healing and blessing to the animals, the plants, the air, and the water of Boston.

Wednesday, March 15th

Genesis 7

1Finally, the day came when the LORD said to Noah, "Go into the boat with all your family, for among all the people of the earth, I consider you alone to be righteous. 2Take along seven pairs of each animal that I have approved for eating and for sacrifice, and take one pair of each of the others. 3Then select seven pairs of every kind of bird. There must be a male and a female in each pair to ensure that every kind of living creature will survive the flood. 4One week from today I will begin forty days and forty nights of rain. And I will wipe from the earth all the living things I have created."

5So Noah did exactly as the LORD had commanded him. 6He was 600 years old when the flood came, 7and he went aboard the boat to escape--he and his wife and his sons and their wives. 8With them were all the various kinds of animals--those approved for eating and sacrifice and those that were not--along with all the birds and other small animals. 9They came into the boat in pairs, male and female, just as God had commanded Noah. 10One week later, the flood came and covered the earth.

11When Noah was 600 years old, on the seventeenth day of the second month, the underground waters burst forth on the earth, and the rain fell in mighty torrents from the sky. 12The rain continued to fall for forty days and forty nights. 13But Noah had gone into the boat that very day with his wife and his sons--Shem, Ham, and Japheth--and their wives. 14With them in the boat were pairs of every kind of breathing animal--domestic and wild, large and small--along with birds and flying insects of every kind. 15Two by two they came into the boat, 16male and female, just as God had commanded. Then the LORD shut them in.

17For forty days the floods prevailed, covering the ground and lifting the boat high above the earth. 18As the waters rose higher and higher above the ground, the boat floated safely on the surface. 19Finally, the water covered even the highest mountains on the earth, 20standing more than twenty-two feet above the highest peaks. 21All the living things on earth died--birds, domestic animals, wild animals, all kinds of small animals, and all the people. 22Everything died that breathed and lived on dry land. 23Every living thing

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on the earth was wiped out--people, animals both large and small, and birds. They were all destroyed, and only Noah was left alive, along with those who were with him in the boat. 24And the water covered the earth for 150 days.

Points of Interest:

- 'Go into the boat with all your family'—while he is by no means timid about doing what's necessary to see evil stopped, in the end God is fundamentally a rescuer. He provides a way for Noah and his family—and indeed for all of creation—to survive.
- 'seven pairs of each animal that I have approved for eating and for sacrifice'—God advises Noah to rescue more of the animals that will be used for food and other human needs.
- 'to ensure that every kind of living creature will survive'—there will be an end to this flood, and when it ends the work of multiplying to fill the earth will begin again.
- 'he and his wife and his sons and their wives'—Noah's whole family benefits from his faithfulness.
- 'Everything died that breathed and lived on dry land'—God had warned the man and the woman that death would follow from eating the fruit of the knowledge of good and evil. They did not immediately die, but death did indeed come as a result of the cycle of sin they began.

Taking it home:

- *For you and your family:* God considers Noah alone to be righteous, but his righteousness brings about the rescue of his entire family. Is there someone in your family who is an example of goodness or closeness to God? Take a moment today to thank God for that family member, and for the way that family member has blessed your whole family. Would you like to be that kind of person? Pray that God would cause good things to come to your family through you.
- *For our church:* God gave Noah the task of providing his family and representatives of all living things with a place of rescue and safety. Ask God to give us both the privilege and the ability to provide a similar haven of life to people whom we encounter. Pray that people who visit us during these forty days would feel freedom, comfort, and refreshment.
- *For our city:* Adam and Eve decide that they will trust their own perceptions when they eat the fruit, rather than listening to God's warning; that choice leads to such violence and terror that God must destroy the earth to put a stop to it. Noah listens to God's warning, and rescues himself, his family, and ultimately the world. While I don't think God intends us to be mindless drones, he does suggest that things will go better for us if we trust him and if we keep in mind that we can often be deceived if we consult only ourselves. Boston is a city that has something of a history of being suspicious of God's leading, and Cambridge in particular is a place where very high value is placed on human reason. Pray for a new level of trust of God in our city. Pray that the people of our city would use our minds in partnership with God, instead of in opposition to him. And pray that we would live newly abundant lives as we step out into listening to God.

Thursday, March 16th

Genesis 8

1But God remembered Noah and all the animals in the boat. He sent a wind to blow across the waters, and the floods began to disappear. 2The underground water sources ceased their gushing, and the torrential rains stopped. 3So the flood gradually began to

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recede. After 150 days, 4exactly five months from the time the flood began, the boat came to rest on the mountains of Ararat. 5Two and a half months later, as the waters continued to go down, other mountain peaks began to appear.

6After another forty days, Noah opened the window he had made in the boat 7and released a raven that flew back and forth until the earth was dry. 8Then he sent out a dove to see if it could find dry ground. 9But the dove found no place to land because the water was still too high. So it returned to the boat, and Noah held out his hand and drew the dove back inside. 10Seven days later, Noah released the dove again. 11This time, toward evening, the bird returned to him with a fresh olive leaf in its beak. Noah now knew that the water was almost gone. 12A week later, he released the dove again, and this time it did not come back.

13Finally, when Noah was 601 years old, ten and a half months after the flood began, Noah lifted back the cover to look. The water was drying up. 14Two more months went by, and at last the earth was dry! 15Then God said to Noah, 16"Leave the boat, all of you. 17Release all the animals and birds so they can breed and reproduce in great numbers." 18So Noah, his wife, and his sons and their wives left the boat. 19And all the various kinds of animals and birds came out, pair by pair.

20Then Noah built an altar to the LORD and sacrificed on it the animals and birds that had been approved for that purpose. 21And the LORD was pleased with the sacrifice and said to himself, "I will never again curse the earth, destroying all living things, even though people's thoughts and actions are bent toward evil from childhood. 22As long as the earth remains, there will be springtime and harvest, cold and heat, winter and summer, day and night."

Points of Interest:

- 'But God remembered Noah and all the animals in the boat'—they are just one little boat floating in a watery expanse, but God's attention is on them. God begins to work to restore to them once again a good creation, a suitable place for them to live and thrive.
- 'He sent a wind to blow across the waters'—this is an echo of chapter one, verse two, when the Spirit of God was hovering over the surface of the empty chaos. In Hebrew, 'wind,' 'spirit,' and 'breath,' are closely related words. So, in this verse, we see a renewal of God's creative work. The same Spirit that was hovering over the watery chaos in the beginning is now blowing this new watery chaos away with his breath.
- 'and at last the earth was dry!'—it was indeed a very long time. It was almost 13 months from the time they entered the boat to the time they left it. Noah seems to have gotten a bit restless—and understandably so—as he waits for the waters to recede. The first time he checks to see how dry things are, there's not even a safe place for a bird to land. He really wants out of that boat.
- 'so they can breed and reproduce in great numbers'—the mission to multiply and fill the earth is begun again. Chapters 8 and 9 are in many ways a re-make of chapters one through three. Like in chapter one, we have here the separation of the sea and the dry land, followed by the commission to multiply and fill the empty world. The big difference here is that a handful of people and animals are actually alive to experience the watery chaos. Noah, his family, and the animals have been on quite a journey. They started out in a violent and wicked world. They escaped that world, but only by journeying through a death-filled catastrophic flood. Now, God has brought them to a fresh, new world. It's an empty world, waiting for them to fill it and bring order.

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- 'built an altar to the LORD and sacrificed on it the animals'—Noah immediately uses some of the animals he has carried with him in a ritual of thankfulness. Although we can't know for sure, Noah and his family probably ate the animals that they sacrificed to God. Thus, this animal sacrifice is not completely unlike inviting God to join them for dinner, in gratitude for what he has done for them.
- 'I will never again curse the earth'—God responds enthusiastically to Noah's invitation. He is so pleased with this moment of friendship between himself and Noah's family which kicks off the renewal of creation that he determines right then and there that he will never again—until the end of time—purge the world as he has just done
- 'even though people's thoughts and actions are bent toward evil'—God is not naïve in his appreciation of this peaceful moment. He fully expects that humanity will once again figure out endless ways to multiply evil on the earth. In fact, in part his resolution not to judge the earth again seems to come from a brutally realistic assessment that it wouldn't ultimately work: if he were going to judge the earth whenever people turn toward evil, he'd be doing it constantly. Nonetheless, he considers these moments of harmony so precious that they make all of this trouble worthwhile.

Taking it home:

- *For you and your family:* God is a rescuer of those who turn to him. Are there times of difficulty God has brought your family through? Spend a moment to thank God for saving you from this trouble. Are you or your family facing any significant difficulties right now? Ask God to bring you out of them or through them in safety.
- *For our church:* We see in this passage just how much God enjoys spending time with his people and how lavishly he responds when his people express their thankfulness to him. Pray that our church would grow in our heart of worship of God. Pray that we would see more good come about in our life together as we do.
- *For our city:* Noah's act of worship of God brought blessing not just to himself, but to the whole world. Pray that our entire city would experience a greater measure of God's grace because of our choice to express our thankfulness to God.

Friday, March 17th

Genesis 9: 1-17

1God blessed Noah and his sons and told them, "Multiply and fill the earth. 2All the wild animals, large and small, and all the birds and fish will be afraid of you. I have placed them in your power. 3I have given them to you for food, just as I have given you grain and vegetables. 4But you must never eat animals that still have their lifeblood in them. 5And murder is forbidden. Animals that kill people must die, and any person who murders must be killed. 6Yes, you must execute anyone who murders another person, for to kill a person is to kill a living being made in God's image. 7Now you must have many children and repopulate the earth. Yes, multiply and fill the earth!"

8Then God told Noah and his sons, 9"I am making a covenant with you and your descendants, 10and with the animals you brought with you--all these birds and livestock and wild animals. 11I solemnly promise never to send another flood to kill all living creatures and destroy the earth." 12And God said, "I am giving you a sign as evidence of my eternal covenant with you and all living creatures. 13I have placed my rainbow in the clouds. It is the sign of my permanent promise to you and to all the earth. 14When I send clouds over the earth, the rainbow will be seen in the clouds, 15and I will remember my

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covenant with you and with everything that lives. Never again will there be a flood that will destroy all life. 16When I see the rainbow in the clouds, I will remember the eternal covenant between God and every living creature on earth." 17Then God said to Noah, "Yes, this is the sign of my covenant with all the creatures of the earth."

Points of Interest:

- 'Multiply and fill the earth'—it's hard to overstate just how significant this issue of multiplication is to God. The very reason we exist is to multiply ourselves to fill the world with the image of God. God could have simply filled the earth with his goodness with a word. Instead, he placed his image in us, and gave us the ability and responsibility to expand the reach of that image as we multiplied. God has two priorities in creation, priorities that he is pursuing simultaneously: to have his goodness fill the earth, and to have it happen through us.
Not only is it our responsibility to multiply ourselves; it's an intrinsic part of our nature. We do indeed multiply who we are, both the good and the bad. Adam and Eve saw their godliness and faithfulness multiplied in Seth's family line (at least for a while) and their rebellion and selfishness multiplied in Cain's family. Now, we see the work of multiplication start again with Noah's family. The question is, what will be multiplied? How will things turn out this time?
- 'will be afraid of you'—in this restart of creation, God is making some adjustments based on the past experience. Sadly, one of his adjustments is to introduce an element of division into the relationship between humans and animals. I think this new awe in which animals will hold humans is in response to the serpent's bold temptation last time around. Similarly, he specifically endorses the eating of animals, whereas last time human beings were told to eat plants and care for animals.
- 'murder is forbidden'—another response to last time, when Cain murdered his brother. Last time, God warned death would follow from eating the fruit; this time, death follows from killing. In both the creation and the re-creation, God shows his high value on life. The first time, he puts the Tree of Life in the middle of the garden. The second time, he protects life from being taken; even when life is legitimately taken for food, Noah and his family are to show proper respect for the life they have taken by how they treat the blood.
- 'When I send clouds over the earth'—I bet that, after lived through the Flood, Noah's family never really enjoyed rain again. I would imagine every rainstorm would be greeted with some uncertainty: is this another flood? Even today, there's something awesome and troubling about a storm. I consider myself to be a relatively rational, brave, and self-assured man, but I have to admit that I don't like to be alone during a thunderstorm. I wonder if there's some sort of primal memory of the Flood at work there. On the other hand, there's nothing quite as uplifting as happening to catch sight of a rainbow. I can't explain it rationally, but it's true. I can't imagine how encouraging it must have been for Noah's family to see that rainbow and know that God was not going to send another flood.

Taking it home:

- *For you and your family:* It's somewhat awe-inspiring to consider that we were designed to multiply. We end up reproducing who we are. This happens most profoundly and completely by having children, but it happens in real and significant ways by how we influence all of the people we interact with all of the time. Think of your very best traits, and imagine them having a multiplying effect on all of the people

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you influence. Now consider all of your worst traits; those too, we have both the power and the tendency to replicate. Pray that God would maximize the good multiplicative impact you have, and that he would minimize the negative. Ask God to form you more and more into the kind of person who will multiply goodness, abundance, and peace in the world around you.

- *For our church:* Pray that our church would have many children. As I mentioned last week, we have a dream of seeing 200 new churches birthed out of our church. Please pray once again that we would see that dream come true. Particularly pray for the team of people which is currently at work planning for a new site in Boston. Ask God to give them everything they need to thrive, and pray that they would only be the first among many new churches that spread from us all over the Boston metropolitan area.
- *For our city:* Please pray once again that God would bring about a reversal of the recent rise in violence and murder in our city. Pray that God would protect the lives of the youth of our city, and pray particularly that violence between Boston and Cambridge youth that has been happening in our own neighborhood would come to a halt.

Saturday, March 18th

Genesis 9: 18-29

18 Shem, Ham, and Japheth, the three sons of Noah, survived the Flood with their father. (Ham is the ancestor of the Canaanites.) 19 From these three sons of Noah came all the people now scattered across the earth.

20 After the Flood, Noah became a farmer and planted a vineyard. 21 One day he became drunk on some wine he had made and lay naked in his tent. 22 Ham, the father of Canaan, saw that his father was naked and went outside and told his brothers. 23 Shem and Japheth took a robe, held it over their shoulders, walked backward into the tent, and covered their father's naked body. As they did this, they looked the other way so they wouldn't see him naked. 24 When Noah woke up from his drunken stupor, he learned what Ham, his youngest son, had done. 25 Then he cursed the descendants of Canaan, the son of Ham:

"A curse on the Canaanites!
May they be the lowest of servants
to the descendants of Shem and Japheth."

26 Then Noah said,
"May Shem be blessed by the LORD my God;
and may Canaan be his servant.

27 May God enlarge the territory of Japheth,
and may he share the prosperity of Shem;
and let Canaan be his servant."

28 Noah lived another 350 years after the Flood. 29 He was 950 years old when he died.

Points of Interest:

- 'Ham is the ancestor of the Canaanites'—the Canaanites end up being a big enemy of God's people, the Israelites, later on in history.
- 'he became drunk on some wine'—this second half of chapter nine ends up being something of a replaying of the Fall of Humanity, from chapters 3 and 4. Last time, Eve and Adam ate the fruit and introduced sin, rebellion, blame, and strife into the

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world. This time, Noah drinks fruit. The results are less catastrophic: he just gets falling-down drunk. Interestingly, though, there are similar results on a smaller scale: he is naked and ashamed. The fall is less severe this time than last time, but the re-establishment of creation is followed by a fall, just like last time. The flood did not eradicate sin or the opportunity for error. Just like before, humanity will have to be vigilant if they want to master sin rather than be mastered by it.

- 'went outside and told his brothers'—Ham ends up playing something of the tempter role played by the serpent last time. It seems that he's tempting his brothers to take advantage of their father in some way, perhaps simply by ridiculing him. Essentially, Ham is trying to magnify the shameful results of Noah's drunkenness.
- 'covered their father's naked body'—in this replay of the Fall, Shem and Japheth become imitators of God. God gave Adam and Eve skins to cover their nakedness; Shem and Japheth cover their father's nakedness with a robe.
- 'he cursed the descendants of Canaan'—just like last time, the fall is followed by a curse. This time, Noah pronounces a curse on Canaan.

This curse played an infamous role in the racial history of our country. As we will see in the next chapter, Ham—at least as far as Genesis is concerned—is the forefather of the African nations. White Southerners during the slavery and Jim Crow eras used the so-called 'curse of Ham' to justify and even legitimate the oppression, abuse, and inferior treatment of people of African descent. Just a moment's close attention shows us that that evil interpretation of this passage is completely spurious. First of all, such a response completely overlooks the fact that Genesis calls us to overcome curses, in order to bring God's goodness and abundance to the world, rather than indulging in them. Secondly, and more significantly, there is, in fact, no curse on Ham at all: there is a curse on Canaan, one of Ham's sons, who ends up being the forefather of the people who possess the Promised Land before the Israelites. This curse has nothing at all to do with the sons of Ham who end up being the founders of the African nations. Even as a curse on Canaan, the ancestral enemy of the Israelites, rather than on Ham, I see this curse as a terrible tragedy. I must confess that there's an exquisite appropriateness to it: Noah is essentially wishing that Ham would find his youngest son to be a disappointment, just as Noah has found his youngest son to be. So, there's a rough sort of justice to it. However, this curse re-introduces the sibling rivalry first seen in Cain and Abel. It seems like, in the second start on creation, we would have been better off without this particular family dynamic.

Taking it home:

- *For you and your family:* In this passage, we see humanity fall right back into many of the same problems from which God just rescued them. They are stuck in a negative pattern. Do you see such problematic problems in your own life or the life of your family? Ask God to break the power of those patterns and to provide a new way for you and your family to relate.
- *For our church:* Pray for us that God would build us into a community of grace. Ask God that we would be the kind of people who know how to bring freedom from shame to one another. Pray that God would lead us away from any temptation to magnify one another's shame or use it for our own gain.
- *For our city:* Sadly, Boston is known for a good deal of rivalry between neighborhoods and between people groups. Pray that we would be able to move out of these

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traditional divisions and sources of bitterness. Pray that God would give our city the power to experience a new peace and harmony.

Sunday, March 19th

Genesis 10

1 This is the history of the families of Shem, Ham, and Japheth, the three sons of Noah. Many children were born to them after the Flood.

2The descendants of Japheth were Gomer, Magog, Madai, Javan, Tubal, Meshech, and Tiras.

3The descendants of Gomer were Ashkenaz, Riphath, and Togarmah.

4The descendants of Javan were Elishah, Tarshish, Kittim, and Rodanim. 5Their descendants became the seafaring peoples in various lands, each tribe with its own language.

6The descendants of Ham were Cush, Mizraim, Put, and Canaan.

7The descendants of Cush were Seba, Havilah, Sabtah, Raamah, and Sabteca. The descendants of Raamah were Sheba and Dedan.

8One of Cush's descendants was Nimrod, who became a heroic warrior. 9He was a mighty hunter in the LORD's sight. His name became proverbial, and people would speak of someone as being "like Nimrod, a mighty hunter in the LORD's sight." 10He built the foundation for his empire in the land of Babylonia, with the cities of Babel, Erech, Akkad, and Calneh. 11From there he extended his reign to Assyria, where he built Nineveh, Rehoboth-ir, Calah, 12and Resen--the main city of the empire, located between Nineveh and Calah.

13Mizraim was the ancestor of the Ludites, Anamites, Lehabites, Naphtuhites, 14 Pathrusites, Casluhites, and the Caphtorites, from whom the Philistines came.

15Canaan's oldest son was Sidon, the ancestor of the Sidonians. Canaan was also the ancestor of the Hittites, 16Jebusites, Amorites, Girgashites, 17Hivites, Arkites, Sinites, 18Arvadites, Zemarites, and Hamathites. 19Eventually the territory of Canaan spread from Sidon to Gerar, near Gaza, and to Sodom, Gomorrah, Admah, and Zeboiim, near Lasha.

20 These were the descendants of Ham, identified according to their tribes, languages, territories, and nations.

21Sons were also born to Shem, the older brother of Japheth. Shem was the ancestor of all the descendants of Eber. 22The descendants of Shem were Elam, Asshur, Arphaxad, Lud, and Aram.

23The descendants of Aram were Uz, Hul, Gether, and Mash.

24Arphaxad was the father of Shelah, and Shelah was the father of Eber. 25Eber had two sons. The first was named Peleg--"division"--for during his lifetime the people of the world were divided into different language groups and dispersed. His brother's name was Joktan.

26Joktan was the ancestor of Almodad, Sheleph, Hazarmaveth, Jerah, 27Hadoram, Uzal, Diklah, 28Obal, Abimael, Sheba, 29Ophir, Havilah, and Jobab. 30The descendants of Joktan lived in the area extending from Mesha toward the eastern hills of Sephar.

31These were the descendants of Shem, identified according to their tribes, languages, territories, and nations.

32These are the families that came from Noah's sons, listed nation by nation according to their lines of descent. The earth was populated with the people of these nations after the Flood.

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Points of Interest:

- 'The earth was populated with the people of these nations'—this genealogy is intended to describe how we get from Noah and his three sons to the nations Moses knows of when he is writing. Interestingly, this genealogy follows more of a geopolitical logic than an ethnological logic: people we would think of as ethnically related are placed in different families, and people who seem quite different are placed in the same families. While there are some exceptions to the general rule and there are other nations that we no longer know about, it basically breaks down this way: Japheth's descendants form the nations that are on the edges of Moses' known world, mostly across the sea; Ham's family are those who live in Palestine and North Africa, and with whom the Israelites will later experience some rivalry; Shem's family is the family from which the Israelites will come, with their origins to the north and east of the future Israel, in Mesopotamia (now Iraq and Syria).
- 'a mighty hunter in the LORD's sight'—the translation of this phrase is a bit ambiguous. It might mean something like, 'God's own hunter,' or it might mean, 'a mighty hunter who was always in God's face.' It's clear that he was a great hunter; it's not clear whether he was working for or against God and his purposes.
- 'from whom the Philistines came'—along with the Canaanites, the bitterest of Israel's future rivals.
- 'during his lifetime the people of the world were divided into different language group'—we'll hear about this story tomorrow.
- 'according to their tribes, languages, territories, and nations'—in chapter one, we hear of the plants, the fish, the birds, and the land animals all multiplying according to their kinds, spreading an abundant diversity as they multiply and fill the earth. We see here the same thing begin to develop as the human beings multiply and spread: they develop and spread a diversity of cultures and nations.

Taking it home:

- *For you and your family:* In this passage, we see humanity begin to grow into a wonderful diversity. There are multiple languages, and cultures, and nations; and they all express God's creativity and give a unique reflection of his image. The amazing thing is that the actual diversity is far greater and more wonderful than Moses could imagine or express. What's your place in this wonderful collection of diverse nations? What are the ethnic and cultural roots of your family? Thank God for your ethnic heritage. Take a moment today to share with your children, your spouse, a housemate, or a co-worker a story about your family or a tradition from your culture that they might not know about.
- *For our church:* We see here that God's plan really is a whole-world plan. Every nation and every people is important to God and to his goal of filling the world with his goodness. Pray for the current students of our Perspectives course, a class which talks about what God is doing around the world. Pray that the participants in this course would have a new appreciation for God's worldwide plan and for their part in it.
- *For our city:* Thank God for the diversity of ethnicities, languages, and cultures that live so close to one another in our city. Thank God for the blessing each people group is to our city. Ask that God would give you the chance to learn something new from someone of a different ethnicity who shares this city with you, and pray for a general spirit of openness and learning to grow and expand in our city.