



Week 2: Cain & Abel, Noah, Tower of Babel

Day 1: Genesis 4:1-16 (Cain kills Abel and is punished/protected)

4 Now the man knew his wife Eve, and she conceived and bore Cain, saying, "I have produced a man with the help of the LORD." 2 Next she bore his brother Abel. Now Abel was a keeper of sheep, and Cain a tiller of the ground. 3 In the course of time Cain brought to the LORD an offering of the fruit of the ground, 4 and Abel for his part brought of the firstlings of his flock, their fat portions. And the LORD had regard for Abel and his offering, 5 but for Cain and his offering he had no regard. So Cain was very angry, and his countenance fell. 6 The LORD said to Cain, "Why are you angry, and why has your countenance fallen? 7 If you do well, will you not be accepted? And if you do not do well, sin is lurking at the door; its desire is for you, but you must master it."

8 Cain said to his brother Abel, "Let us go out to the field." And when they were in the field, Cain rose up against his brother Abel, and killed him. 9 Then the LORD said to Cain, "Where is your brother Abel?" He said, "I do not know; am I my brother's keeper?" 10 And the LORD said, "What have you done? Listen; your brother's blood is crying out to me from the ground! 11 And now you are cursed from the ground, which has opened its mouth to receive your brother's blood from your hand. 12 When you till the ground, it will no longer yield to you its strength; you will be a fugitive and a wanderer on the earth." 13 Cain said to the LORD, "My punishment is greater than I can bear! 14 Today you have driven me away from the soil, and I shall be hidden from your face; I shall be a fugitive and a wanderer on the earth, and anyone who meets me may kill me." 15 Then the LORD said to him, "Not so! Whoever kills Cain will suffer a sevenfold vengeance." And the LORD put a mark on Cain, so that no one who came upon him would kill him. 16 Then Cain went away from the presence of the LORD, and settled in the land of Nod, east of Eden.

Understanding the Passage:

The main characters in chapter 4 are Cain and Abel, the first set of siblings to ever walk the earth. But the real main character is sin and it's all-too-familiar manifestation. Cain took the events from verse 3-5 and let them master him. When his brother received regard from the

Lord, Cain got caught in the comparison trap. His work was not recognized by God, which causes something deep within him to come to the surface.

Have you ever been there? Someone else has gotten recognized for their work when you were also doing very good work. A sibling is Mom and Dad's favorite and everyone knows it. Management withholds their approval of your work while showering others with praise. These are scenarios that do not exist solely in childhood. We can be tormented by envy as adults. Try as we might, envy can still get the best of us. Even without our permission we can find ourselves in Cain's shoes: sadness, loneliness, envy, anger, lashing out at someone else. Fortunately, most of us aren't driven to the extreme of murder, but we can certainly identify with the underlying emotional experience of Cain.

Like with any soap opera saga, our attention is easily drawn to the negatives in this story: envy, murder, dishonesty, betrayal, shame. All of that is there, but so is the boundless love of God.

God's actions are a loud message of love. God knows the truth of how Abel, another beloved child of God died. And yet, God offers protection and care to Cain. There are natural consequences for Cain's actions: shame, guilt, grief, and loss. God doesn't assuage those, but God also gives Cain what he needs most: love, forgiveness, and the opportunity to remain in God's family. Perhaps one day Cain will find a way to forgive himself.

Questions for Discussion and Reflection:

1. What is the difference between Cain's and Abel's offering?
2. Have you ever experienced envy that has caused you to make choices you regret? Share and discuss.
3. Reread the dialogue between Cain and God. Why do you think God offers grace to Cain?

Day 2: Genesis 6:11-22, 8:1-12 (Flood)

¹¹ Now the earth was corrupt in God's sight, and the earth was filled with violence. ¹² And God saw that the earth was corrupt; for all flesh had corrupted its ways upon the earth. ¹³ And God said to Noah, "I have determined to make an end of all flesh, for the earth is filled with violence because of them; now I am going to destroy them along with the earth. ¹⁴ Make yourself an ark of cypress wood; make rooms in the ark, and cover it inside and out with pitch. ¹⁵ This is how you are to make it: the length of the ark three hundred cubits, its width fifty cubits, and its height thirty cubits. ¹⁶ Make a roof for the ark, and finish it to a cubit above; and put the door of the ark in its side; make it with lower, second, and third decks. ¹⁷ For my part, I am going to bring a flood of waters on the earth, to destroy from under heaven all flesh in which is the breath of life; everything that is on the earth shall die. ¹⁸ But I will establish my covenant with you; and you shall come into the ark, you, your sons, your wife, and your sons' wives with you. ¹⁹ And of every living thing, of all flesh, you shall bring two of every kind into the ark, to keep them alive with you; they shall be male and female. ²⁰ Of the birds according to their kinds, and of the animals according to their kinds, of every creeping thing of the ground according to its kind, two of every kind shall come in to you, to keep them

alive. ²¹ Also take with you every kind of food that is eaten, and store it up; and it shall serve as food for you and for them.” ²² Noah did this; he did all that God commanded him.

Ch. 8 But God remembered Noah and all the wild animals and all the domestic animals that were with him in the ark. And God made a wind blow over the earth, and the waters subsided; ² the fountains of the deep and the windows of the heavens were closed, the rain from the heavens was restrained, ³ and the waters gradually receded from the earth. At the end of one hundred fifty days the waters had abated; ⁴ and in the seventh month, on the seventeenth day of the month, the ark came to rest on the mountains of Ararat. ⁵ The waters continued to abate until the tenth month; in the tenth month, on the first day of the month, the tops of the mountains appeared.

⁶ At the end of forty days Noah opened the window of the ark that he had made ⁷ and sent out the raven; and it went to and fro until the waters were dried up from the earth. ⁸ Then he sent out the dove from him, to see if the waters had subsided from the face of the ground; ⁹ but the dove found no place to set its foot, and it returned to him to the ark, for the waters were still on the face of the whole earth. So he put out his hand and took it and brought it into the ark with him. ¹⁰ He waited another seven days, and again he sent out the dove from the ark; ¹¹ and the dove came back to him in the evening, and there in its beak was a freshly plucked olive leaf; so Noah knew that the waters had subsided from the earth. ¹² Then he waited another seven days, and sent out the dove; and it did not return to him any more.

Understanding the Passage:

There are some stories in the Bible that are difficult to read and interpret. The Flood is one such story. It's important to remember that this story is historical in that there is geological evidence for a very large, recorded flood around 29000 BCE from the Tigris and Euphrates Rivers. Many ancient cultures in the region contain flood stories and the involvement of the divine. In this story the movement is from the original Adam to Noah. Later it will be Noah to Moses and so on until we get to Jesus. There may be sin and destruction along the way, but there will always be a remnant left (in the Old Testament) to carry God's plan of loving redemption forward to eventually Jesus' final acts of salvation.

As Christians, we must read this story within the larger context of Scripture knowing that it was put in our cannon to teach us about God's redemptive plan for humanity. Instead of seeking to read this passage as a literal historical account (of which it is not), we can ask a larger question. What does this story tell us about how the Israelites understood God? This story is one piece to a larger theological statement from Genesis to Exodus of God as deliverer.

The word Ark here is the Hebrew word *tevah*, which literally means basket. It's no coincidence that this is the same word used in the Exodus story. Moses, as an infant, would be sent down the river in a *tevah*. God delivers humankind from the garden, providing what they need to live. God delivers Noah from the undoing of creation and into the regeneration of creation. God delivers the Israelites out of slavery in Egypt. And over 2,000 years ago God delivered us from slavery to sin and death both in that moment in this very

moment. God is not the cause of the fallen and broken nature of this world. Instead, God is the deliverer.

It's often easier to see the sins of others rather than our own. With our sin-blindness, there are many ways to reason our way out of it. Perhaps we tell ourselves that our problems aren't as important as those of others. Sometimes we can simply throw our hands up at the chaos and destruction that overload us in the world. Perhaps we simply block it all out and live in denial. If we do not acknowledge our sin and pain, then we fool ourselves into a place of not needing a Savior. We certainly needn't dwell or wallow, but we can offer it to God who will meet us in a place where deliverance is possible.

Questions for Discussion and Reflection:

1. From what do you need delivering today?
2. Locate other places in Scripture that depict God as deliverer.
3. Why is it important for us to read stories like this one within the context of a loving and redeeming God?

Day 3: Genesis 8:13-9:17 (God's covenant)

¹³ In the six hundred first year, in the first month, on the first day of the month, the waters were dried up from the earth; and Noah removed the covering of the ark, and looked, and saw that the face of the ground was drying. ¹⁴ In the second month, on the twenty-seventh day of the month, the earth was dry. ¹⁵ Then God said to Noah, ¹⁶ "Go out of the ark, you and your wife, and your sons and your sons' wives with you. ¹⁷ Bring out with you every living thing that is with you of all flesh—birds and animals and every creeping thing that creeps on the earth—so that they may abound on the earth, and be fruitful and multiply on the earth." ¹⁸ So Noah went out with his sons and his wife and his sons' wives. ¹⁹ And every animal, every creeping thing, and every bird, everything that moves on the earth, went out of the ark by families.

²⁰ Then Noah built an altar to the LORD, and took of every clean animal and of every clean bird, and offered burnt offerings on the altar. ²¹ And when the LORD smelled the pleasing odor, the LORD said in his heart, "I will never again curse the ground because of humankind, for the inclination of the human heart is evil from youth; nor will I ever again destroy every living creature as I have done.

*²² As long as the earth endures,
seedtime and harvest, cold and heat,
summer and winter, day and night,
shall not cease."*

⁹ God blessed Noah and his sons, and said to them, "Be fruitful and multiply, and fill the earth. ² The fear and dread of you shall rest on every animal of the earth, and on every bird of the air, on everything that creeps on the ground, and on all the fish of the sea; into your hand they are delivered. ³ Every moving thing that lives shall be food for you; and just as I gave you the green plants, I give you everything. ⁴ Only, you shall not eat flesh with its life, that is, its blood. ⁵ For your own lifeblood I will surely require a reckoning: from every animal I will

require it and from human beings, each one for the blood of another, I will require a reckoning for human life.

*⁶ Whoever sheds the blood of a human,
by a human shall that person's blood be shed;
for in his own image
God made humankind.*

⁷ And you, be fruitful and multiply, abound on the earth and multiply in it."

⁸ Then God said to Noah and to his sons with him, ⁹ "As for me, I am establishing my covenant with you and your descendants after you, ¹⁰ and with every living creature that is with you, the birds, the domestic animals, and every animal of the earth with you, as many as came out of the ark. ¹¹ I establish my covenant with you, that never again shall all flesh be cut off by the waters of a flood, and never again shall there be a flood to destroy the earth." ¹² God said, "This is the sign of the covenant that I make between me and you and every living creature that is with you, for all future generations: ¹³ I have set my bow in the clouds, and it shall be a sign of the covenant between me and the earth. ¹⁴ When I bring clouds over the earth and the bow is seen in the clouds, ¹⁵ I will remember my covenant that is between me and you and every living creature of all flesh; and the waters shall never again become a flood to destroy all flesh. ¹⁶ When the bow is in the clouds, I will see it and remember the everlasting covenant between God and every living creature of all flesh that is on the earth." ¹⁷ God said to Noah, "This is the sign of the covenant that I have established between me and all flesh that is on the earth."

Understanding the Passage:

The rainbow is one of the most memorable symbols that comes out of the Old Testament. The rainbow is a symbol of promise, hope and ultimately God's covenant. The rainbow shows up at the end of the flood narrative as a physical reminder of God's promise to absorb the wrath that sin creates.

This flood story is one where we can identify with Noah. Sadly, we know the damage of flooding all too well. We know what it's like to step outside after the waters have receded. The smell, the heat, the overwhelming shock. Stepping outside after such an event can be devastating. The first thing we usually do is begin to assess the damage. However, when Noah steps off the boat he doesn't begin to assess the damages, call the insurance agents, or begin to clean up for the purposes of rebuilding. Instead, we see Noah do something kind of crazy. Noah gets right away to building. But he doesn't build a new dwelling. He builds an altar and worships God. He purposefully goes to God and enters God's presence and God responds. Notice that God does not withhold God's self. God pours out God's love on Noah and his generations.

This covenant is a foreshadowing of what is to come with Abraham. But even here God is not only promising goodness for Noah and his people, but for all people. The rainbow is a promise to "all flesh" on the earth. God's covenant faithfulness will first come to Abraham and his descendants, but here we see a hint of just how wide the gates will fling when Jesus

enters the picture. The bow will never again point toward the people, instead it will point at God in the person of Christ.

Questions for Discussion and Reflection:

1. Imagine you are Noah coming out of the Ark. What do you feel, smell, see? How does God show up for you there?
2. Why do you think Noah builds an altar right away?
3. Discuss the larger themes in this narrative: deliverance from sin, covenant faithfulness, foreshadowing the work and person of Jesus.

Day 4: Genesis 9:18-27 (Noah's drunkenness, curse of Canaan)

¹⁸ The sons of Noah who went out of the ark were Shem, Ham, and Japheth. Ham was the father of Canaan. ¹⁹ These three were the sons of Noah; and from these the whole earth was peopled.

²⁰ Noah, a man of the soil, was the first to plant a vineyard. ²¹ He drank some of the wine and became drunk, and he lay uncovered in his tent. ²² And Ham, the father of Canaan, saw the nakedness of his father, and told his two brothers outside. ²³ Then Shem and Japheth took a garment, laid it on 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. ²⁴ When Noah awoke from his wine and knew what his youngest son had done to him, ²⁵ he said,

*"Cursed be Canaan;
lowest of slaves shall he be to his brothers."*

*²⁶ He also said,
"Blessed by the LORD my God be Shem;
and let Canaan be his slave.*

*²⁷ May God make space for Japheth,
and let him live in the tents of Shem;
and let Canaan be his slave."*

Understanding the Passage:

Some parts of Scripture seem very odd to our modern senses. Why on Earth would the ancient writers include a story that most people would just omit from the telling of their family history? The author is telling us something important here. It is in this passage that we see an entire people group get blessed and another get cursed. This curse continued to impact the descendants of the Canaanites throughout all of the Old Testament.

Noah's sons can be seen as individuals, but they can also be seen as preparing the table for the nations. From Ham comes the Canaanites. Shem will produce the "Shemites" or Semites (from which Abraham will come). The genealogy following Japheth is disputed.

So what's the big deal? Noah was in a particular state in his tent and his son saw him. The author gives no further detail and scholars have speculated heavily with no real success about the possible redactions from this story. The text communicates to us that it's not the seeing of his naked father that was wrong, but what he does with that information. He shares his father's shameful state with a broader audience. His actions are then juxtaposed with his brothers'. They are depicted in great detail as falling all over themselves to show honor to and keep their father's public honor intact. Therefore, one son is cursed and the others are blessed.

Biblical interpretation is important. This passage has been used wrongly to justify chattel slavery in U.S. history. Sadly, it was the church and American Christians who were convinced that slavery was a biblical mandate because of an erroneous interpretation of the curse of the Canaanites. It's vital that we do not make universal rules/laws based on one or two passages. We must also interpret passages within the whole of Scripture. When we see that larger arc of Scripture pointing toward liberation and freedom for all then we must hold that in tension with passages that seem to suggest differently. The enslavement of Ham/Canaan and the Canaanites is intended to communicate subjugation, not enslavement.

So, what is the takeaway from this passage? Enslavement happens in the wake of sin. Sin begets more sin and brokenness. A son sins and a curse enters the lineage of generations to come. Sin begets sin and has far-reaching impacts. Entire people groups go to war with one another. It is this type of brokenness on such a mass level that Jesus Christ came to heal and redeem. These are the chains that Christ breaks for us, as individuals, and for entire generations and families.

Questions for Discussion and Reflection:

1. What parallels to the Eden story can you find in this passage?
2. Why is Biblical interpretation important? Have you ever come to understand a passage differently than a previous time? How did it change your faith?
3. How does the commandment, "Honor your father and mother," intersect with this passage?

Day 5: Genesis 11:1-9 (Tower of Babel)

11 Now the whole earth had one language and the same words. ² And as they migrated from the east, they came upon a plain in the land of Shinar and settled there. ³ And they said to one another, "Come, let us make bricks, and burn them thoroughly." And they had brick for stone, and bitumen for mortar. ⁴ Then they said, "Come, let us build ourselves a city, and a tower with its top in the heavens, and let us make a name for ourselves; otherwise we shall be scattered abroad upon the face of the whole earth." ⁵ The LORD came down to see the city and the tower, which mortals had built. ⁶ And the LORD said, "Look, they are one people, and they have all one language; and this is only the beginning of what they will do; nothing that they propose to do will now be impossible for them. ⁷ Come, let us go down, and confuse their language there, so that they will not understand one another's speech." ⁸ So the LORD scattered them abroad from there over the face of all the earth, and they left off building the city. ⁹ Therefore it was called

Babel, because there the LORD confused the language of all the earth; and from there the LORD scattered them abroad over the face of all the earth.

Understanding the Passage:

Why are they building this tower? This tower is a ziggurat. Not meant for people to go up, but instead for God to come down. An executive elevator of sorts. The builders are wanting to make a sacred space for worship, a place where God's name is to be exalted. Except they get it backwards. They want to exalt their name.

The text is clear: they want to remain united, and they want to make a name for themselves. In naming these motivations they are wantonly admitting that they either wish to autonomously (without God's help) secure the future for themselves and/or to gain notoriety with a building project (a common practice of the kings of the day). Neither of these motivations express a worshipful heart toward YHWH and they certainly are not considering the command to fill the earth given in Genesis 1:28 and 9:1. They are confused about their relationship to God. So their name becomes Babel, which means *confusion*.

The scattering that comes after a visit from God seems harsh. However, there is grace contained therein. In the building of this tower with these specific motivations, a threat comes to the health and prosperity of God's creation. The garbling of languages and a scattering prevents any other projects from a self-serving, self-seeking people group. These new language barrier and subsequent relocation of the people places limits on human possibilities for the sake of all of creation.

Not that their actions led to the exact thing they were attempting to avoid. They wanted to build a tower to remain united (in the subsequent establishment of a singular governing power). They wished to NOT be scattered, and yet in taking matters into their own hands they became scattered.

Sometimes our best efforts can result in the very thing we were avoiding. We vow to never be like "Dad," only to hear his voice come out of our mouths when correcting our own children. We avoid a much-needed conversation in order to "keep the peace," only to be blind-sided by the exploding conflict that built over time. We plan and scheme and try to make things work out so that "everyone is happy," and they still find something to fight over at the family Thanksgiving.

Sometimes our best-laid plans need scattering. Sometimes we need a bit of confusion in order to find our way back to God. The Old Testament theologian Walter Brueggemann writes, "Ordinarily we regard unity in the human community as desirable and in tune with God's purposes for creation. But here, because the unity desired and promoted stands over against the divine will to spread abroad throughout the world, a unity that seeks self-preservation at all costs, God must resist it and act to advance the divine will for scattering."

We are reminded that those who seek to preserve their life will lose it and those who lose their life will find it. The right kind of unity is one that cares for the concerns of the whole

world and includes difference and diversity. The unity Christ calls us to is one in which we love and respect differences, live without oppression and live with a common pursuit of God's purposes for the world.

Questions for Discussion and Reflection:

1. Have you ever had a moment where the very thing you were trying to avoid ended up happening? Share and discuss.
2. Discuss the themes of diversity and unity. How might we hold together these two seeming opposing concepts?
3. Why would taking matters into our own hands be a bad thing?

Video Questions:

1. Discuss what it means to miss the mark?
2. What does it mean to be delivered from sin?
3. What is God's response to sin?
4. Why does God mark Cain?
5. Thinking of the mark of Cain, has God marked us? How so?
6. Discuss the importance of the covenant God makes with Noah. What does it contain?
7. How does the covenant of Noah point us to the work Christ will do on the Cross?
8. What role does faithfulness play in the flood story? What role does it play in your life today?
9. What other places in the Old Testament point to God as deliverer?
10. What are you needing delivering from today?