

“GETTING ACQUAINTED WITH THE OLD TESTAMENT”

SESSION #4

4. The Flood (Gen. 6-8)

Genesis chapters 6, 7 and 8 deal with one of the most famous stories in the Bible, the Flood. This is another event that gathers controversy and there is no scholarly consensus about the universality of the flood in terms of its geographic scope.

But it certainly was a literal flood which killed people and animals. New Testament references to the Flood can be found in Matthew 24, Luke 17, Hebrews 11, 1 Peter 3 and 2 Peter 2 & 3.

Jesus Himself referred to it as something that was definitely a literal flood, it wasn't just a legend or myth with some kind of spiritual analogy. And it happened because God had to take drastic action to judge sin.

He judges sin here with water; in the final judgment when He will deal for the final time with the sin of humanity it will not be with water but with fire. Sin always attracts God's judgment because He is a holy God and sin is something that devastates His creation whom He loves.

In great contrast to the order we saw in the creation story, this judgment brings chaos because sin has catastrophe built into it. That's its nature. And as you see something of what happens here in this first widespread judgment on sin, it is catastrophic indeed.

But notice the place of 'nature' as you come to chapter 9 and the aftermath of the Flood, in God's covenant with Noah. The sign of this covenant was the appearance of the rainbow as God's promise that He will never again destroy the world with a flood of water.

As one writer put it, *“God unstrings His deadly bow of wrath and hangs it up forever on the wall of heaven.”*

In Romans 8 Paul notes the implications of sin and redemption for the created world. And God right back here in Genesis begins to connect our sin and our redemption with the created world by using a symbol from the created world: a rainbow to demonstrate His promise. It is right that God's people have environmental concerns. We are the stewards of God's creation and the created world around us does get tremendously influenced by our actions and especially our sin. But some day it will all be put together anew and afresh.

5. The Tower of Babel (Gen. 11)

Now we come to another famous story in the Bible. Chapter 11 verse 4 tells us that this tower was built by early mankind for a particular reason: *"Come let us build ourselves a city and a tower whose top is in the heavens; let us make a name for ourselves, lest we be scattered abroad over the face of the whole earth."* So, one of their purposes in building this tower was to reach to heaven.

And then secondly, *"let's do that to make a name for ourselves"*, a reputation.

And thirdly, *"we do it so as not to be scattered."* There will be some focal point here that will hold us together, bind us together, that will give us a reason for staying together, when God has said to scatter around the world and replenish the world. And they said, *"No, we're going to stay in one spot."*

There's an astonishing statement made in verse 6 and it's made by God: *"Indeed the people are one and they all have one language, and this is what they begin to do; now nothing that they propose to do will be withheld from them."* What is God saying?

Here is one people, having one purpose, speaking one language. God says if they are allowed to continue with this terrific sense of unity, then they will be able to do almost anything. So, He comes down to disrupt the building of the tower of Babel.

God's people today have, I think, the same potential if we are indeed one people, as the Bible says, if we will exercise the unity of the Body of Christ, if we will live together for one purpose, if we will speak one language. Paul said, "speaking the truth... what?... in love." Speaking the truth in love is the kind of language that you and I as Christians need to learn how to speak. If these things could be characteristic of us – unity, purpose, and speaking one language together – the potential for God's people is absolutely enormous; it's mind boggling. We are people who are meant to build Bethel, the house of God, not Babel. The same powerful potential is there.

In Hebrew, "Babel" means "confusion". In Babylonian it means "the gate of God". The Babylonians, the original ones here – they were saying as they built this Tower that "*we are the gate of God. And this tower will enable us to get to God. And we will call it 'Babel' – the gate of God.*"

But God comes down and says, "*No, you are not the gate of God. You are confusion.*" And the word 'confusion', the Hebrew term for Babel, is what has come down in the English language to mean the same thing: a babel of sounds, of language.

The concept of "Babylon" (Babel with a Greek ending) begins here but it runs all the rest of the way through Scripture. It recurs often and where we see it, it represents "this present evil world" from here on. A world that has the same kind of attitude these people had in terms of finding their own way to God, of building their own reputation, of disobeying God's direct command. That is an ungodly attitude. And the ungodly world is often spoken of as simply being "Babylon" from here on and especially as you get through to the last book of the Bible where it becomes very prominent indeed.

6. The Structure of Genesis

Now let's take a quick look at the structure of Genesis.

Two major sections make up the book of Genesis: **Primeval History**, the first 11 chapters we've looked at so quickly just now, deal with 2000+ years of human history. Within that 2000 years there are 4 outstanding events: the creation, the fall of man into sin, the flood and the Babel crisis of languages. The origin of the human race is described for us in these first 11 chapters of what is termed Primeval History.

But that's only part of the book of Genesis. The other part is a **Patriarchal History**, chapters 12 through the end of Genesis, chapter 50. These chapters cover a period of 300 years. Again, there are 4 involved here, but not events; these are 4 outstanding men.

Abraham: a man with a supernatural call by God. Isaac: a man with a supernatural birth. Jacob: a man of supernatural care by God. And Joseph, a man under supernatural control.

And here in these chapters, we see not so much the human race in focus, but the origin of the people of God. God choosing out of the human race a group of people with whom He will particularly work as a showcase people so that as He works with them the rest of humanity will see who He really is.

But when you take a look at these two big sections of Genesis, 11 chapters compared to 39 chapters, one dealing with 4 massive events, one dealing with 4 individual people, what is God most interested in? 2000 years, great big events, put them into 11 chapters. 39 chapters for just 300 years where He deals not with big events, not earth-shaking things as we would claim them to be, but just 4 individual people.

You can see pretty clearly by just the amount of space God gives here, that *people* are God's priority. That's what He's concerned about. Yes, YOU are the priority of a loving God!

Come back for our next session where we're going to take a closer look at the 7 main characters in Genesis and wrap up this first book in the Old Testament.
