

# The Primeval History

LESSON  
ONE

## A PERFECT WORLD



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# Contents

<b>I. Introduction.....</b>	<b>1</b>
<b>II. Overview .....</b>	<b>1</b>
A. Inspiration	2
1. Reliability	2
2. Design	2
B. Background	2
1. Availability	3
2. Interaction	3
C. Purpose	4
<b>III. Literary Structure.....</b>	<b>5</b>
A. Dark Chaotic World	6
B. Ideal World	6
C. Six Days of Ordering	7
<b>IV. Original Meaning.....</b>	<b>8</b>
A. Dark Chaotic World	9
B. Ideal World	10
C. Six Days of Ordering	12
1. Deliverance from Egypt	12
2. Possession of Canaan	13
<b>V. Modern Application.....</b>	<b>14</b>
A. Inauguration	15
B. Continuation	16
C. Consummation	17
<b>VI. Conclusion .....</b>	<b>19</b>

# The Primeval History

## Lesson One

### A Perfect World

#### INTRODUCTION

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A few years ago, I was driving my car and I came across a train that had jumped its tracks. And of course it just sat there going nowhere. When a train derailed off the path it was made to follow, it simply sits there, and it's one big mess.

Well, in the beginning of time, God laid a track, or a path, for his creation to follow and this path led toward a grand and glorious destiny for God's creation. But time and again, human beings have failed to follow God's path for his creation. We have derailed the world and ended up with one big mess.

In this series of lessons, we will be learning about the path that God laid down for his creation in the earliest years of world history — what we often call in Christian circles “creation ordinances.” And we will be exploring Genesis 1–11, often known as *The Primeval History*. These chapters of the Bible will help us see the amazing path God wanted the people of Israel to follow under the leadership of Moses. And they will also show us the path his people should follow even today.

We have entitled our first lesson, “A Perfect World” because we will focus our attention on Genesis 1:1–2:3, the passage where Moses first described how God shaped the world into a perfect order that greatly pleased him.

As we will see, this ideal world anticipated or foreshadowed the destiny toward which God took Israel in the days of Moses — the same destiny toward which God takes all his people throughout history. It not only shows us how things were in the beginning, but also how life should be now, and how our world will certainly be at the end of our age.

This lesson divides into four parts: First, we will present an overview of the primeval history of Genesis 1–11. Second, we will narrow our focus to Genesis 1:1–2:3, looking first at its literary structure. Third, we will investigate the original meaning of this portion of Genesis in the light of its structure. And fourth, we will look for the proper modern applications of this passage. Let's begin with an overview of the entire primeval history of Genesis 1–11.

#### OVERVIEW

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Our approach to Genesis 1–11 may seem a bit unusual at first. So, we should explain our basic strategy. At least three main ideas will guide our study of this part of the Bible: first, the inspiration of these chapters; second, the literary background behind these chapters; and third, the purpose for which these chapters were written.

In the first place, we are firmly committed to the divine inspiration of all of Scripture, including Genesis 1–11.

## INSPIRATION

Our evangelical understanding of inspiration reminds us of two very important features about this part of the book of Genesis: first, its reliability, and second, its intentional design.

### Reliability

We affirm in the strongest terms that this part of the Bible is completely reliable because it is divinely inspired. Now, many historical issues come to the foreground when we study this part of the Bible, and some of these issues have not been fully resolved. But for our purposes it will suffice to say that divine inspiration implies historical reliability. Moses intended his original readers to receive this portion of Genesis as historically true. Now, just as with all Scripture, we have to interpret these passages carefully so that we don't misunderstand their historical dimensions. Nevertheless, it is clear that other biblical writers, and even Jesus himself, believed that the stories of Genesis 1–11 were trustworthy history. These lessons will build on the belief that these chapters are true and reliable records of what actually happened in ancient times.

While we believe that the primeval history is reliable, we must always remember that God inspired Moses to select and arrange the content of these chapters according to a particular design.

### Design

Think about it this way: Genesis 1–11 covers the whole history of the world from creation to the days of Abraham, who lived around 2000-1800 B.C. Now we would all agree that Moses left out many more world events from that period of time than he included in these eleven short chapters. So, to understand Genesis 1–11 we must take note of this selectivity as well as of the arrangement of these chapters. As we notice how Moses intentionally designed this primeval history, we will be able to answer some very important questions. Why did God inspire Moses to include this little information? And why did God have Moses arrange these chosen materials as he did?

To understand why Moses wrote as he did, we must first look into the background of the literary traditions that existed in his day.

## BACKGROUND

The literature of the ancient Near East is very important to our purposes first because other primeval accounts were widely available to Moses, and second, because Moses actually interacted with other primeval accounts.

## Availability

Archaeological research has demonstrated that Moses was not the first person to write about the world's origins. To be sure, God inspired Moses, so that his account is true. But Moses wrote in a day when many nations and groups in the Near East had already written many myths and epics about primeval history.

Some of these ancient texts are well known. Many people have heard of things like the *Enuma Elish*, or the Babylonian creation story, or "Tablet Eleven" of the *Gilgamesh Epic*, or the Babylonian flood story. An assortment of primeval accounts were written in Egypt and Canaan as well. These and many other documents from the ancient world dealt with the origins and early history of the universe.

And not only that, but many of these ancient Near Eastern documents were actually available to Moses in his youth. Moses was educated in the royal courts of Egypt, and his writings indicate that he knew the literature of the ancient world. As Moses wrote his own divinely-inspired and true account of the primeval period, he was quite aware of other literary traditions in the ancient Near East.

Knowing that other primeval accounts were available to Moses, we are now in a position to ask another question: How did Moses interact with the myths and epics of other cultures?

## Interaction

As we will see throughout this series of lessons, Moses interacted with other primeval traditions both negatively and positively.

On the one hand, Moses wrote his history of the early times to counter falsehood with truth. We must always remember that the Israelites Moses led had been subjected to all kinds of pagan influence. They were tempted to believe that the world resulted from the efforts and struggles of many gods. They either rejected the true faith of their patriarchs, or they mixed this truth with the religious beliefs of other nations. In many respects, Moses wrote his account of the primeval times to teach the people of God the way things actually happened. He sought to establish the truth of Yahwism against the falsehoods of other religions.

At the same time, Moses accomplished this negative purpose of refuting false myths by interacting positively with the literary traditions of his time. His writings purposefully resembled other ancient near eastern writings so that he could communicate God's truth in ways that Israel could understand. Although there are many similarities between Moses' account and several important texts, recent archaeological research has pointed to a dramatic similarity with one particular literary tradition.

In 1969 an important document was published under the title *Atrahasis: The Babylonian Story of the Flood*. Now we cannot be sure of how far back the tradition of this document reaches, but it is important to us because it brings together in one story many pieces which previously had been known only separately.

The *Atrahasis Epic* follows a basic threefold structure: It begins with the creation of humanity. The creation of humanity is followed by a record of early human history, which focuses especially on the corruption of the world due to the human race. And then finally, this corruption is rectified by a flood of judgment and a new world order.

Comparing Genesis with *Atrahasis* strongly supports the idea that Moses formed his record with an intentional overarching structure. At first glance, Genesis 1 through 11 may seem to be a loose collection of passages that move from one topic to another without much continuity, but simply noticing the broad literary parallels with *Atrahasis* helps us to see that Moses' primeval history holds together as a single story line with an overarching structure.

Genesis 1–11 divides into three parts: first the ideal creation in 1:1–2:3; second, the corruption of world due to human sin in Genesis 2:4–6:8; and then finally, the flood and new order in Genesis 6:9–11:9.

Now we are in position to ask a third question: Why did Moses write Genesis 1–11? What did he intend to convey to his Israelite readers?

## PURPOSE

On a very basic level, we can be sure that Moses wanted to teach Israel the truth about the past. He wanted them to know what their God had done in the early years of world history. Just as the myths of other nations were intended to convince people of the perspectives of those myths, Moses sought to convince Israel of the historical truths of their faith.

But upon closer examination, we are going to see an additional purpose behind Moses' primeval history. Specifically, he also wrote in order to influence Israel to conform themselves to God's will. Now, this additional purpose is not readily apparent to everyone who reads Genesis 1–11, but it becomes clearer once we realize that other primeval accounts shared this same purpose as well.

Before we can understand the purpose of primeval accounts of the ancient world, we have to realize that many ancient Near Eastern cultures believed that the universe was structured or patterned according to a supernatural cosmic wisdom. In its ideal state, the universe operated according to this wisdom or divine order. And it was the responsibility of every person in society, from the emperor to the slave, to conform as much as possible to this divine order.

Now what does this have to do with primeval myths and epics in the ancient near east? The cultures around Israel had primeval accounts which spoke about the events near the beginning of time. They did this in order to explain the structures, which the gods had erected in the world in ancient times. Their traditions regarding the primeval times were not merely concerned with early world history. They wrote their primeval accounts to justify their current religious and social programs. The writers of these texts, who were often priests, pointed to the ways the gods had originally arranged the world in order to show how things were supposed to be in their own day. At times, they focused specifically on religious matters, such as temples, and priests, and rituals. Which temple was favored by the gods, and which priestly family was to serve? At other times, they were concerned with broader social structures, such as political power and laws. Who

was to be king? Why were some people slaves? Their myths called the people to conform to the creation ordinances of the gods, the structures they had set for the universe.

As we will see in these lessons, Moses wrote Genesis 1–11 for very similar reasons. On the one hand, Moses wrote his primeval history with an explicit focus on the ways Yahweh had created and ordered the world in ancient times. From creation to the tower of Babel, Moses told Israel about the way things happened long ago. Yet he did not do this simply out of historical interest. As Moses led the Israelites from Egypt to the Promised Land, he faced many opponents who believed that he had actually misled the children of Israel. And in response to this opposition, the primeval history demonstrated that Moses' policies and goals for Israel were true to God's design for the universe. As a result, to resist Moses' program was to resist the ordinances of God.

In his record of the ideal creation in Genesis 1:1–2:3, Moses showed that Israel was actually moving toward God's ideal by going toward Canaan. In his record of the world's corruption in 2:4–6:8, Moses showed that Egypt was a place of corruption and hardship, which resulted from God's curse on sin. Finally, in his record of the flood and the resulting new order in Genesis 6:9–11:9, Moses showed Israel that he was bringing them into a new order with many blessings, just as Noah before him had brought new order and blessings to the world. These primeval facts fully justified Moses' vision for Israel's future. If he could convince Israel of these truths, then the faithful among Israel would turn away from Egypt and take the land of Canaan as their divine inheritance.

Now that we have introduced our general approach to the primeval history of chapters 1–11, we are in a position to look at the details of the first section of Genesis: God's Ideal World described in Genesis 1:1–2:3.

## LITERARY STRUCTURE

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When most Evangelicals think about the opening chapter of the Bible, they think about all the controversies that surround its interpretation. Did God create the world in six ordinary days? Were the “days” of Genesis 1 great ages or epochs? Or is Genesis 1 a somewhat poetic, non-historical celebration of God's creative activity? All of these positions are acceptable within evangelical circles. Although my own view is that Genesis 1 teaches that God made the world as we know it today in six ordinary days, not all Bible-believing Christians hold to this view.

As we approach the opening chapters of Genesis in these lessons, our concern is not so much with historical issues like these. We are more concerned with literary questions. We are more interested in how and why Moses wrote this chapter. What literary structures appear in this passage? And how do these structures help us understand Moses' purpose?

We should begin by noting that this passage has three major steps, namely, a beginning, a middle, and an ending.

Moses' creation account begins with 1:1-2. We may summarize the content of these verses as the “dark chaotic world.” Chapter 1:3-31 form a middle section of this material which contains the so-called “six days of creation,” or what we will call the “six



days of ordering” creation. Finally, 2:1-3 is the Sabbath day, or as we will call it, the “ideal world.”

We will explore all three portions of this structure in this lesson, beginning with the dark chaotic world. Second, we will investigate the last section which deals with the ideal world. And finally, we will explore the six days of ordering. Let’s look first at the dark chaotic world of 1:1-2.

## DARK CHAOTIC WORLD

Looking at the first portion of Genesis 1, we see a very important dramatic tension between the chaos covering the earth and the spirit of God.

The opening of 1:1-2 sets the stage by giving a title in verse 1, and by describing the initial condition of the world in verse 2. Listen to the way Moses put it in 1:2:

**Now the earth was formless and empty, darkness was over the surface of the deep, and the Spirit of God was hovering over the waters (Genesis 1:2).**

This verse introduces the dramatic tension that flows through this entire chapter. On one side of this tension, the world is “formless and empty,” or as it is said in Hebrew, *tōhû wābōhû* (תֹהוּ וָבֹהוּ). This Hebrew expression does not occur frequently enough in the Bible for us to know precisely what it means. But many scholars believe that it meant that the world was uninhabitable, hostile toward human life, much like a desert or wilderness is inhospitable to human life. So, at the beginning of this passage, we see that an uninhabitable, dark, primordial, chaotic deep covered the entire earth.

The second element in the dramatic tension also appears in 1:2. Moses wrote that “the Spirit of God was hovering over the waters.” The Hebrew term used here is *merachefet* (מְרַחֶפֶת) which means to “fly above” or to “encircle above.”

So we see a very dramatic picture right at the beginning of this passage. On one side we see chaos on the earth; on the other side we see the Spirit of God hovering above the chaos. In effect, God was ready to move into action to remedy the chaos which covered the earth. This initial dramatic tension raised several questions: What will the Spirit of God do? What will happen to the chaos?

With this initial dramatic tension of the opening verses in mind, we are in a position to look at the resolution of this tension in the final section of Moses’ creation account: the ideal world in Genesis 2:1-3.

## IDEAL WORLD

This section is structured very simply. It begins in 2:1 with a summary statement that God had finished his creative work, and it concludes in 2:2-3 with God at rest. We read these words in Genesis 2:2-3:

**By the seventh day God had finished the work he had been doing; so on the seventh day he rested from all his work. And God blessed the seventh day and made it holy (Genesis 2:2-3).**

When Moses described God as entering a state of Sabbath rest, granting a special blessing to that day and making it holy, he declared that the tension between the chaos and God's hovering Spirit had been resolved. God had subdued the darkness, ruled over the chaotic deep, and delighted in his ideally ordered world. The creation story comes to an end with this delightfully peaceful vision of the universe in perfect harmony.

Now that we have seen how Moses' creation account begins and ends, we should look at the middle portion of this passage which describes how the tension between the chaotic world and God's hovering Spirit was resolved.

### **SIX DAYS OF ORDERING**

This passage teaches that God restrained the chaos by ordering the world according to a wondrous six day plan described in 1:3-31. The central focus of this material becomes clear when we see that Moses repeatedly introduced the actions with the phrase, "And God said." This is because God is the main character of this material, and his powerful word is the focus of these verses.

God's mere word brought magnificent order to the world. Unlike many of the mythological gods from other cultures, the God of Israel faced no struggles and no battles as he created. He simply spoke, and the world took its proper order. Beyond this, God's spoken word displayed his powerful wisdom. God put the world into the order that seemed best to him.

Many interpreters have recognized that the days of God's ordering creation fall into two sets of three: days 1 through 3 and days 4 through 6. The relationships between these two sets of days have been described in many ways, and there are multiple interconnections.

One helpful way to introduce ourselves to these patterns is to draw upon the description of the earth in Genesis 1:2. You will recall that Moses said the earth was formless and empty, *tōhū wābōhū* (תֹהוּ וָבֹהוּ). These terms may be used to explain the significance of the two sets of three days.

On one side, during the first three days, God dealt with the fact that the earth was "formless." That is to say, he brought form to his creation by separating one area from another and shaping spheres or domains within his creation. On the other side, during the last three days, God dealt with the fact that the chaotic world was "empty" or "void." God's solution was to fill up the various domains he had created with inhabitants.

Think about the first three days. On day one, God separated the domain of day from the night. Even before there was a sun, God caused light to shine in the darkness of the dark, chaotic world.

On day two, God separated the area of waters below and waters above by stretching a dome, or firmament, above the earth. This divine action caused what we now call the atmosphere of our planet, separating the water on earth from the moisture in the sky above.

On day three, God separated the territory of dry land from the seas. The oceans were gathered into regions of the earth, and the land appeared. Vegetation began to grow on the dry land. So it is that on the first three days, God brought form to a formless world. He erected the domains of light and darkness, the sky separating waters above and waters below, and the dry land of the earth.

According to Moses' record, once God dealt with the formlessness of the earth by creating domains during the first three days, he then dealt with the emptiness of the earth in the last three days by placing inhabitants in these domains.

On day four God placed the sun, moon, and stars in the heavens to fill up the domains of light and darkness which he had formed on the first day. These heavenly bodies were put in the sky to rule over the day and night and to keep them separate.

On the fifth day, God placed birds in the air and sea creatures in the oceans. These inhabitants filled the domains of waters above and below which had been formed on the second day.

Finally, on the sixth day God placed animals and humanity on the dry land. These inhabitants filled up the domain of the dry land which God had caused to rise out of the sea on the third day.

Moses gathered the whole of creation into these domains and their inhabitants. In a word, God spent six days bringing a splendid order to the dark chaotic world. His work was so wonderful that six times God said:

**“It is good” (Genesis 1:4, 10, 12, 18, 21, 25).**

And after he made humanity to live on the dry land, he said:

**“It is very good” (Genesis 1:31).**

Moses made it very clear that God was wonderfully pleased with what he had done.

So we see that Genesis 1:1–2:3 has a very intentional, complex structure. The passage begins with the world in chaos and God about to move upon it. For six days God spoke order into the chaotic world. Consequently, on the seventh day God delighted in the ideal order he had brought to the world, and he enjoyed his Sabbath rest.

Now that we have seen the large literary structure of Genesis 1:1–2:3, we are in a position to see how the original meaning of this passage is conveyed.

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## ORIGINAL MEANING

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We have already seen that on a large scale Moses' primeval history was intended to validate Israel's exodus and conquest by showing how they were in accordance with the order God had established in the early history of the world. But how did this general purpose show itself in the particular account of 1:1–2:3? How did Moses connect his ministry to Israel with the creation story?

We will explore how Moses did this by looking once again at the three main parts of Genesis 1:1–2:3. First, we will look at the dark chaotic world. Then we will move to the last section of the ideally ordered world. And finally, we will return to the middle portion of the passage where God ordered the world. Let's look first at 1:1-2, the dark chaotic world.

## DARK CHAOTIC WORLD

For our purposes, the most important feature of the first two verses of Genesis is the dramatic tension introduced in verse 2. The manner in which Moses described the dramatic tension between the chaotic world and the Holy Spirit made it clear that he was not only writing about creation, but was also writing about Israel's exodus.

On the one hand, you will recall that in Genesis 1:2 Moses described the earth as "formless," or *tōhû*. On the other hand, he described the Spirit of God as "hovering," or in Hebrew, *merachefet*.

The significance of this scene becomes clear when we look at a passage in which Moses alluded to this dramatic portrait from Genesis. In Deuteronomy 32:10-12 Moses used the terminology of Genesis 1:2 to draw special attention to the connection between Israel's exodus and the creation account. Listen to what he says in these verses:

**In a desert land [the Lord] found him, in a barren and howling waste.  
He shielded him and cared for him; he guarded him as the apple of  
his eye, like an eagle that stirs up its nest and hovers over its young,  
that spreads its wings to catch them and carries them on its pinions.  
The Lord alone led him; no foreign god was with him (Deuteronomy  
32:10-12).**

These verses are important because they are the only other place where Moses used the terms "formless" and "hovering" in all of his writings.

In verse 10, the term here translated "barren" is the Hebrew word *tōhû*, which appears in Genesis 1:2 as "formless." Also, in verse 11, the term translated "hovers" is *merachefet*, the term used in Genesis 1:2 when the Spirit of God "hovers" over the deep.

Moses put these two terms together in Deuteronomy 32 in order to connect it solidly with Genesis 1. But just how did the use of these terms draw this connection? What did the terms "barren" and "hover" mean in Deuteronomy 32?

In the first place, Moses applied the term "barren" to Egypt. In 32:10 we read these words:

**In a desert land [the Lord] found him, in a barren and howling waste  
(Deuteronomy 32:10).**

In the second place, Moses used the term "hover" for God's presence with Israel, probably the pillar of smoke and fire, as he led the nation toward the Promised Land. In 32:10-11 we read these words:

**He guarded him as the apple of his eye, like an eagle that stirs up its nest and hovers over its young (Deuteronomy 32:10-11).**

In many respects, we may treat Deuteronomy 32:10-12 as Moses' commentary on his own work in Genesis 1:2. It gives us insight into his intention as he wrote the first chapter of Genesis.

Deuteronomy 32 helps us understand that Moses saw a parallel situation between the creation and Israel's deliverance from Egypt. Moses wrote that both creation and Israel's deliverance from Egypt involved chaotic, uninhabitable worlds. He also wrote that God moved into the original chaotic world by hovering, much as he hovered over Israel when he delivered them from Egypt.

From these parallels between creation and the Exodus, we can see that Moses wrote about the dark chaotic world not simply to tell Israel about the creation; he also presented God's work at creation as a prototype, a pattern, or a paradigm, which explained what God was doing for the nation of Israel in his day. When Moses wrote about God's original work in creation, he did so to show his readers that they had not made a mistake in following him out of Egypt. Instead, the creation account proved how their deliverance from Egypt was a mighty act of God. God was re-ordering the world by delivering Israel from the chaos of Egypt, like he did in the beginning. God now hovered over Israel like he hovered over the creation in the beginning. Rather than being a mistake, the Exodus from Egypt was God at work bringing his desired order back to the world. In a word, Israel's deliverance from Egypt was nothing less than a re-creation.

With this parallel between the beginning of Genesis chapter 1 and Israel's exodus experience in mind, we can see this perspective confirmed as we look at the final portion, the ideally ordered world in 2:1-3.

## **IDEAL WORLD**

You will recall that the creation story ends with God entering his rest. The Hebrew term for "rest" in Genesis 2:2-3 is *shabbat* (שָׁבַת), or as we say it, "Sabbath." And this terminology connects the creation story to Israel's exodus in yet another way.

Moses and the Israelites used the term *shabbat* primarily to refer to Sabbath observances which they would enjoy according to the law of Moses. In fact, in the listing of the Ten Commandments in Exodus 20, Moses explained that Israel was to observe the Sabbath because of what God had done in Genesis 2.

**Remember the Sabbath day by keeping it holy... For in six days the Lord made the heavens and the earth, the sea, and all that is in them, but he rested on the seventh day (Exodus 20:8-11).**

When Israel heard in Genesis that God rested on the seventh day, they could not help but relate the Genesis account to their own Sabbath observances and to the Ten Commandments.

Although the Israelites kept Sabbath in some measure in the wilderness, it is important to realize that the full extent of Sabbath worship could only take place in the Promised Land. The Israelites were to keep a weekly Sabbath, as we find in Exodus 20:8-11. But they were also to keep other holy days or Sabbaths. For instance, we learn from Leviticus 25 that they were also to observe every seventh year as a Sabbath year by leaving the ground fallow. Israel was also to keep the great year of Jubilee every fiftieth year when all debts were forgiven and all the families were to return to their original land inheritances. In Moses' law, the full worship of God in Sabbath observance was much more complex than anything the Israelites observed as they wandered through the wilderness.

Because the full observance of Sabbath could only take place as Israel entered the land, Moses often spoke of Canaan as a land of "rest," or the "resting place," using the Hebrew terms *nuach* (נָחַ) or *menucha* (מְנוּחָה), which are often closely associated with *shabbat* (Sabbath). In a number of places, Moses described the Promised Land as Israel's resting place where the nation would finally observe worship as God's law required. For instance, in Deuteronomy 12:10-11 we read these words:

**But you will cross the Jordan and settle in the land the Lord your God is giving you as an inheritance, and he will give you rest from all your enemies around you so that you will live in safety. Then to the place the Lord your God will choose as a dwelling for his Name — there you are to bring everything I command you: your burnt offerings and sacrifices, your tithes and special gifts, and all the choice possessions you have vowed to the Lord (Deuteronomy 12:10-11).**

We see in this passage that the full observance of Sabbath — the worship of God — would take place only after Israel had entered the land of rest.

For Moses, Sabbath stood for more than individuals and families setting apart a day for quiet worship. Sabbath was a central dimension of Moses' vision of dwelling in the land of rest, worshipping and celebrating at the special place where God would place his Name. This is why in Psalm 95:11 God spoke of those who were forbidden to enter the land of Canaan in this way:

**So I declared on oath in my anger, "They shall never enter my rest" (Psalm 95:11).**

This close connection between Sabbath and the full national worship of God in the Promised Land explains why Moses ended his account of creation with God entering his Sabbath rest. Moses was explaining to the Israelites that just as God had moved the earth from chaos to Sabbath, he was moving Israel from the chaos of Egypt to the goal of Sabbath in the Land of Promise. Moses was leading Israel to the place of rest, the land of Canaan. And those who resisted Moses' program were not merely resisting a human plan. They were actually resisting God's efforts to bring his people into conformity with the ideal structures of the universe. Leaving Egypt and entering the Land of Promise was nothing less than lining up with God's perfect plan for the creation.

Now that we have seen how the chaotic beginning and Sabbath end of the creation story explained the true nature of what God was doing for Israel through Moses, we should look briefly at some of the elements of the middle portion of the days of ordering in Genesis 1:3-31. How did Moses link the days of creation to his ministry?

## **SIX DAYS OF ORDERING**

There are many links between the days of creation and Israel's exodus, but we will look at only two of these: first, the connections with the deliverance from Egypt, and second, the goal of possessing the Promised Land.

### **Deliverance from Egypt**

In the first place, in delivering Israel from Egypt, God displayed the same kind of power he demonstrated in the ordering of creation in Genesis 1. On one side of the picture, God reversed the order established at creation by sending plagues on the Egyptians. For example, rather than waters teeming with life as in the beginning, the waters of Egypt became deadly and the fish died when God turned the water into blood. Rather than humans having dominion over the living things as God ordained in the beginning, frogs, gnats, insects and locusts ruled over the Egyptians. The separation of light and darkness at creation was overturned as darkness covered the land of Egypt even during the daytime. And rather than the ground bringing forth vegetation, hail, fire and locusts destroyed all the crops in Egypt. Rather than being fruitful and multiplying, both Egyptian animals and people died in large numbers. In these and many other ways, the curses on Egypt reversed the order God had established in the six days of Genesis 1. During the time of the plagues, the land of Egypt truly regressed toward the primordial chaos. It is no wonder then that Moses summoned Israel to leave that place, calling it a formless, barren wasteland.

Any Israelite who believed that life was good in Egypt had to reckon with Moses' creation account. Their experience in Egypt stood in stark contrast to the way the Egyptians themselves thought about their land. The Egyptians believed it was a land blessed by the gods, and apparently at least some Israelites had believed this as well. But Moses made it clear that Egypt had become the opposite of God's ideally ordered world.

While this contrast with Egypt is plain enough, the six days of creation also had a positive correspondence to the deliverance from Egypt. While the Egyptians saw their land regress into the primordial chaos, the Israelites saw God ordering the world in their favor in ways that resembled the six days of creation. Their waters remained fresh and life-giving. They were not overrun by frogs and locusts. They enjoyed light while the Egyptians suffered in darkness. Israelite fields remained productive. Their animals were protected, and the Israelites multiplied while they were in Egypt.

And more than this, in an astounding, dramatic display of his control over creation, God held back the Red Sea and caused dry land to appear before the Israelites, just as it had appeared on the third day of creation. The natural wonders God performed



on Israel's behalf were not unprecedented. In many ways, they recalled the ways God ordered the world in the days of Genesis 1.

These correspondences between the way God ordered the earth in Genesis 1 and the way he delivered Israel from Egypt demonstrated to Moses' readers that God's work on their behalf paralleled his work of creation. In their exodus from Egypt, God reshaped the world as he had in the beginning.

Not only did the deliverance from Egypt recall the days of creation, but the order which God established in the beginning also anticipated the way life would be in the land of Canaan.

## Possession of Canaan

When Israel reached the Land of Promise, nature would be properly ordered with fertility and joy. This is why God called Canaan a land flowing with milk and honey. In addition to this, in the Promised Land, the Israelites would take the proper place of the image of God as it was established in the sixth day.

Notice especially that in Genesis 1:28, God told the human race:

**Be fruitful and increase in number; fill the earth and subdue it. Rule over the fish of the sea and the birds of the air and over every living creature that moves on the ground (Genesis 1:28).**

Although Israel had experienced some of this blessing, even in Egypt, it was in the land of Canaan that God would afford Israel this honor in even greater measure. Under Moses' leadership, the Israelites were on their way to the place where they would fulfill this ideal position in the creation. Listen to what God promised would happen to the faithful Israelites in the land of Israel in Leviticus 26:9:

**I will look on you with favor and make you fruitful and increase your numbers, and I will keep my covenant with you (Leviticus 26:9).**

Here the allusion to Genesis 1:28 is obvious. God said in Genesis 1:28, "Be fruitful and increase in number." In Leviticus 26:9 he said that he would make them fruitful and increase their numbers in the land.

The land of Canaan would be like the wonderful world God ordered in the beginning. Canaan would be a place of natural harmony where the image of God would be able to fulfill its original role in the earth.

We have touched only on a few of the ways the six days of creation connect to Israel's experience in the days of Moses. But we see from this sampling that Moses' record of how God ordered the universe in the first six days was not simply a report of what had happened at the beginning of time. He described the six days of creation in ways that helped his Israelite readers to see clearly what was happening in their own lives. Just as God had moved the cosmos from chaos to Sabbath by ordering nature in



certain ways, God was taking Israel from the chaos of Egypt to Sabbath rest in Canaan by re-ordering the world on their behalf.

We can only imagine the reaction of the Israelites when they heard Moses tell them about the creation of the world. They would have realized what was happening to them was no accident. By redeeming them from Egypt and taking them to Canaan, God was moving in the world as he had done in the beginning to bring an ideal order to the universe. Israel's salvation was a re-creation, and they were to follow Moses into greater and greater experiences of that re-creation.

Now that we have seen the original meaning of Genesis 1:1–2:3, we should move to our final topic, the modern application of the creation account. In applying this text, we will closely follow the ways the New Testament elaborated on the themes of this passage.

## MODERN APPLICATION

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The writers of the New Testament relied heavily on Genesis 1 to tell them about God's creation of the world. They gave every indication that they believed in the reliability of Moses' account. Yet, as important as this fact may be, the New Testament writers also elaborated on Moses' central purpose as we have outlined it here in this lesson.

Just as Moses saw creation as a prototype of Israel's redemption from Egypt, the New Testament looks at Genesis 1:1–2:3 as a prototype of a much greater redemption — the salvation that comes in Christ. The New Testament teaches that all the experiences of salvation and judgment which Israel saw in the days of the Old Testament anticipated the great and final day when God would bring salvation and judgment through his son, Jesus. This belief led New Testament writers to approach Moses' account of creation with a special focus on Christ. Just as Israel was to see her own exodus in the light of creation, New Testament writers looked at Christ in the light of creation.

Whenever we explore the New Testament's teaching on the redemptive work of Christ, we must always remember that New Testament writers realized that Christ did not bring redemption to the world all at once. Instead, they believed that Christ brought great salvation and judgment to the world in three interconnected stages of his kingdom.

In the first place, Christ accomplished much for the salvation of his people when he first came to earth. We may call this period of Christ's first coming, the inauguration of the kingdom. The New Testament looks to Christ's life, death, resurrection, and ascension, as well as to Pentecost and the foundational ministries of the apostles, as the beginning of Christ's great redemption.

In the second place, the New Testament writers understood that Christ's kingdom continues now that he has left this earth. During this time, God's saving grace spreads over the world through the preaching of the gospel. The whole history of the church after the apostles and until the return of Christ comprises the continuation of salvation in Christ.

In the third place, the New Testament teaches that salvation will come in its fullness at the consummation of the kingdom, when Christ returns in glory. We will see

his victory over wickedness, the dead in Christ will rise, and we will reign with him over the world. The salvation begun at Christ's first coming and continuing today will be completed when he returns at the consummation.

These three stages of Christ's kingdom are so essential for understanding the ways New Testament writers elaborated on Moses' creation that we should look at each of them separately. Following the example of Moses writing to Israel, New Testament writers applied the creation account of Genesis to Christ's salvation in the inauguration, continuation, and consummation of Christ's kingdom. Let's look first at the ways the New Testament relates the first chapter of Genesis to the inauguration of the kingdom.

## INAUGURATION

How does the New Testament use creation as a lens for interpreting the inauguration of Christ's kingdom? Well, on several occasions the New Testament speaks of the first coming of Christ as God's re-creation, his reshaping of the cosmos. Consider first the opening words of the gospel of John. In John 1:1-3 we read these words:

**In the beginning was the Word, and the Word was with God, and the Word was God. He was with God in the beginning. Through him all things were made; without him nothing was made that has been made (John 1:1-3).**

Notice that John's gospel starts off, "In the beginning." We all realize that these words come from the opening words of Genesis 1:1 where Moses wrote:

**In the beginning God created the heavens and the earth (Genesis 1:1).**

From the outset, John put his readers in the framework of the creation account in Genesis. Then John went on to say that Christ was the person of the Trinity who made all things; he was the Word of God, spoken at creation, by whom the world was first made.

Although these verses begin with a clear reference to the creation story, as we continue to read in John 1, we find that John subtly shifted from Genesis to another set of events that paralleled the creation account. Listen to what he wrote in the next verses, in John 1:4-5:

**In him was life, and that life was the light of men. The light shines in the darkness, but the darkness has not understood it (John 1:4-5).**

At this point John continued to draw upon the themes of Genesis 1, especially the theme of the *light* which God brought to the dark chaotic world on the first day. Yet, instead of simply speaking of Jesus as the light of Genesis, John pointed to the incarnation of Christ as the light shining into the darkness of the world caused by sin. By shifting from creation to the coming of Christ, John revealed that in Christ's shining against the sinful darkness of the world, God moved against the chaos of the world, just as he had done in the beginning.

A similar motif appears in 2 Corinthians 4:6. There Paul explained the glory of his ministry in this way:

**For God, who said, “Let light shine out of darkness,” made his light shine in our hearts to give us the light of the knowledge of the glory of God in the face of Christ (2 Corinthians 4:6).**

Here Paul directly referred to Genesis 1 in the words, “God ... said ‘Let light shine out of darkness.’” He focused first on the original ordering of creation with the appearance of light, but then drew attention to an important parallel to the creation story — God also “made his light shine in our hearts” when “the glory of God” was seen “in the face of Christ.”

The apostle said that the inauguration of Christ’s kingdom — that time when Christ’s face could be seen on earth — was best understood when it was related to the prototype of God’s original creative work. The same glory God displayed in the appearance of light in the beginning was also revealed at Christ’s first coming into the world of darkness.

From these two passages we find an essential element in the Christian approach to Moses’ creation account. Followers of Christ find in Genesis 1 a portrait, an anticipation, of what God did in the first coming of Christ, the inauguration of the kingdom.

In many ways, you and I face the kind of temptation that the Israelites following Moses faced. God did something wonderful when Christ first came to this world, just as he did when he first delivered Israel from Egypt. Yet, we often fail to see how magnificent God’s work in Christ 2,000 years ago actually was. From an uninformed human vantage point, Christ’s life does not look very important. It can easily be brushed off as just one of many insignificant events that occurred in those times. When we are tempted to think this way about Christ, we must remember the outlook of the New Testament. Christ’s appearance on earth was the beginning of God’s final re-ordering of the world. God was delivering the world from the chaotic darkness of sin and death. Jesus’ first coming began the process by which God would make his creation a wonderful, eternally life-giving place for him and his image to dwell in glory forever. We are right to place our faith in Christ, and in him alone.

So far, we have seen that the New Testament uses the creation story to explain the significance of Christ’s first coming. Now we may see that the New Testament considers the continuation of the kingdom, the period between the first and second comings of Christ, to be a re-creation as well.

## **CONTINUATION**

One familiar passage which illustrates this outlook is 2 Corinthians 5:17:

**Therefore, if anyone is in Christ, he is a new creation; the old has gone, the new has come! (2 Corinthians 5:17).**

The King James Version translates this verse to say that when a person is in Christ he becomes “a new creature.” This translation is unfortunate because it fails to convey Paul’s allusion to the creation account of Genesis 1. The Greek expression is *ktisis* (κτίσις), which is properly translated “creation” (as in most modern translations), not “creature.” In fact, this portion of the passage may actually be translated, “There is a new creation.” Paul’s concept seems to be that when people come to Christ in saving faith, they become part of a new realm, a new world, a new creation.

In this light we see that during the continuation of the kingdom men and women experience the new creation when they place their faith in Christ. In this sense, the Genesis account of creation becomes a way of understanding properly what happens to everyone who hears, believes, and follows Christ. As we become part of God’s new creation, we begin to enjoy the wonder of God’s ideal order for the world.

For this reason, it is not surprising that Paul also described the process of an individual’s salvation in another way that drew upon Moses’ creation account. In Colossians 3:9-10 we read these words:

**You have taken off your old self with its practices and have put on the new self, which is being renewed in knowledge in the image of its Creator (Colossians 3:9-10).**

In this passage, the apostle described what happens to the followers of Christ in terms of Genesis 1. We are “renewed ... in the image of [our] Creator.” Of course, Paul referred to Genesis 1:27 where Moses said that God’s ideal world included Adam and Eve who were created “in the image of God.” During the continuation of the kingdom of Christ, we find that we are constantly “being renewed” in a lifelong process of regaining the status that our first parents held as God’s images.

These two passages demonstrate that the New Testament used Moses’ creation account as a standard for understanding Christ’s work, not only in the inauguration of the kingdom, but also in its continuation.

Of course, the New Testament writers took the themes of Moses’ creation story to one final step. Not only did they look at Christ’s first coming as the beginning of a new creation, and to the continuation of the kingdom as a time when individual people enjoy the effects of the new creation in their lives, but they also applied Creation themes to the final stage of Christ’s work — the consummation of the kingdom.

## CONSUMMATION

At least two passages in the New Testament stand out in this regard. First, Hebrews 4 refers to Christ’s return in terms of Moses’ creation account:

**For somewhere he has spoken about the seventh day in these words: “And on the seventh day God rested from all his work.”... There remains, then, a Sabbath-rest for the people of God; for anyone who enters God’s rest also rests from his own work, just as God did from**

**his. Let us, therefore, make every effort to enter that rest (Hebrews 4:4-11).**

Just as Moses used God's Sabbath day in Genesis 2 to spur Israel toward Canaan, the land of rest, the writer of Hebrews saw God's Sabbath day as an ideal prototype of the ultimate redemption we will experience when Christ returns. In the same way that God ideally ordered the world in the beginning and brought about Sabbath joy, when Christ returns in glory, he will re-order the world and give his people the joy of the final Sabbath rest. As we long for this day, we are told here that we must "make every effort to enter that rest," which will come when Christ returns.

Finally, one of the most magnificent passages that identifies Christ's second coming in terms of Moses' creation account is Revelation 21:1. Listen to the way John applied creation themes to the return of Christ:

**Then I saw a new heaven and a new earth, for the first heaven and the first earth had passed away, and there was no longer any sea (Revelation 21:1).**

John spoke of "a new heaven and a new earth," and this phrase recalls Genesis 1:1 which records that God created "the heavens and the earth." Moreover, John said that in this new world there would "no longer [be] any sea." You will recall that in Genesis 1:9 God restrained the sea, keeping it within boundaries so that dry land could appear and form a safe habitat for the human race. In the new world, after Christ's return, we'll find that the salt seas will be entirely removed from the earth and replaced with fresh life-giving water. The work of Christ is similar to the days of creation in Genesis 1, but in Christ God will go further, much further in bringing the ideal order to completion. The entire universe will be re-created into new heavens and a new earth, and God and his people will enjoy that new world together.

Unfortunately, Christians often disconnect their eternal hope from the creation. We assume that we will spend eternity in the spiritual world up in heaven. But the New Testament is very clear about this. Our final destiny is a return to the Sabbath ordained in the seventh day of creation. We will spend eternity in the new heavens and new earth. This was the hope of Israel in the days of Moses, and it is our hope even today.

When we follow the guidance of the New Testament, we should approach the opening chapter of Genesis as more than a mere record of what happened long ago. It is also a portrait of what God has done in Christ's first coming, what he is doing now in our lives day by day, and what God will one day bring to completion when Christ returns.

In all three stages of Christ's kingdom, God moves against the chaos of sin and death in the world, and in our lives. In the inauguration, continuation, and consummation of the kingdom, he sets the world on a path to its ideal end — a wonderful new creation for his people.

## CONCLUSION

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In this lesson we have seen four main ideas: the overarching purpose of Genesis 1–11, the structure and original meaning of Genesis 1:1–2:3, and the ways the New Testament applies the themes of the creation account to Christ and to our lives. The implications of this approach to Moses' creation record for today are astounding, to say the least.

As Christians living today, we need to see how Moses' original purpose in Genesis applies to our lives in Christ. Just like the Israelites who first heard the opening chapters of Genesis, we are easily discouraged as we follow Christ in this sinful world. But as Moses encouraged his readers to believe that they were on God's way toward his ideal world, we should also be encouraged as we walk God's amazing path toward this ideal world in Christ.

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# The Primeval History

LESSON  
TWO

## PARADISE LOST & FOUND



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# Contents

<b>I. Introduction.....</b>	<b>1</b>
<b>II. Literary Structure.....</b>	<b>1</b>
A. Overview	2
1. In Garden	2
2. Condition Enhanced	2
3. Condition Cursed	2
4. Out of Garden	3
B. Symmetry	3
1. Beginning and Ending	3
2. Middle Portions	4
<b>III. Original Meaning.....</b>	<b>5</b>
A. Garden	5
1. Identity	5
2. Holiness	7
B. Loyalty	9
1. In Eden	9
2. In Canaan	10
C. Consequences	11
1. Death	11
2. Pain	12
3. Exclusion	13
<b>IV. Modern Application.....</b>	<b>14</b>
A. Inauguration	14
1. Paul	15
2. Matthew	16
B. Continuation	17
1. Paul	17
2. James	18
C. Consummation	18
1. Romans	18
2. Revelation	18
<b>V. Conclusion .....</b>	<b>19</b>

# **The Primeval History**

## **Lesson Two**

### **Paradise Lost & Found**

#### **INTRODUCTION**

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I suppose that at one time or another everybody loses something. Maybe it's a book. Maybe it's the key to your home. I don't know about you, but when I lose something like that the first thing I do is retrace my steps. At least in my mind, I go backwards in time step-by-step to remember where I put the thing I lost. Then, once I retrace my steps, I carefully reverse what I did wrong. I put the keys on the table where they are supposed to be, and the book goes back on the shelf. Retracing and reversing what I did is one of the best ways I know to find something I've lost.

Now, we have entitled this lesson, "Paradise Lost and Found," and we will focus our attention on Genesis 2:4–3:24, the story of Adam and Eve's sin in the Garden of Eden. We will see that Moses wrote about Adam and Eve losing paradise to encourage Israel to retrace and reverse the steps Adam and Eve took in that Garden of Eden. Only as Israel learned from this story could they hope to find paradise again, and we will see that the encouragement Moses gave to Israel is also God's message for us today. By going back to the steps of Adam and Eve, Christians today can find paradise too.

Our examination of Genesis 2 and 3 will divide into three parts: First, we will examine the literary structure of this passage. Second, we will focus on the original meaning of these chapters to discern why Moses wrote them as he did for the children of Israel. And third, we will draw attention to modern application by asking how the New Testament guides us toward the proper use of this passage in our lives. Let's begin with the literary structure of our passage.

#### **LITERARY STRUCTURE**

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Although Genesis 2–3 is a rather long passage and touches many topics, it actually forms a unified narrative. To understand this passage properly, we need to focus on these two chapters as one literary unit. Our examination of the literary structure in Genesis 2–3 will have two main concerns: first, we will gain an overview of the major sections of the passage; and second, we will comment on some of the significant symmetries among these various sections so that we may grasp the heart of what Moses was saying to Israel. Let's begin with an overview of the literary structure of Genesis 2–3.

## OVERVIEW

Apart from the brief title that appears in the first half of 2:4, these two chapters divide into four major sections, and these four major sections are indicated primarily by changes in topics and characters. We should walk through these four steps and summarize their basic content.

### In Garden

The first dramatic step of our story appears in 2:4-17, where we read that God put Adam in the Garden of Eden. These verses begin with a panoramic view of the Garden of Eden, and as the passage tells us, the whole garden was Adam's splendid place to dwell and to work. Then the concerns of this section narrow down to the creation of Adam and his commission to work within the garden. Adam was given a great privilege by God's grace. He was to keep the garden on God's behalf.

### Condition Enhanced

The second step of our narrative consists of 2:18-25, which we will designate humanity's "condition enhanced." In this material God added even greater blessings to Adam's life. This section begins by introducing a new problem which is noted in 2:18. There, God looked at Adam and said these words:

**It is not good for the man to be alone. I will make a helper suitable for him (Genesis 2:18).**

The rest of 2:18-25 reports how God dealt with this problem. Adam searched for a partner among the animals, but in the end, God formed a woman and brought her to Adam. In this way, God greatly enhanced the wonderful creation that he had made already for Adam and Eve.

### Condition Cursed

The third step of our narrative is 3:1-21, which we will call humanity's "condition cursed." This material begins in 3:1 with the introduction of a new topic and character, the tempting serpent. From this point forward, 3:1-21 deals with the serpent's temptation and the results of his temptation. Eve falls prey to the serpent's temptation so that she and Adam eat from the forbidden fruit and fall under divine curses.

## Out of Garden

The fourth element in the overarching structure of this passage is 3:22-24 which we have entitled humanity “out of the garden.” This section is marked by another significant shift in topic. We find God speaking about the problem of the Tree of Life. In 3:22 we read these words:

**The man ... must not be allowed to reach out his hand and take also from the tree of life and eat, and live forever (Genesis 3:22).**

To deal with the potential problem of Adam eating from this tree, God drove Adam from the garden and placed cherubim and a flaming sword to guard the entrance to Eden. From that point on, human beings would no longer have access to the Garden of Eden apart from a direct intervention by God.

## SYMMETRY

With the four major divisions of this passage in mind, we may now look more closely at Genesis 2–3 to see the dramatic symmetry that this passage displays. By juxtaposing different elements in these sections, Moses revealed the central concerns of his narrative. To explore the symmetries of this narrative, we will look first at the balance which exists between the beginning and ending of our narrative, and then we will look at the symmetry of the two middle portions of the story. Let’s look first at the beginning and ending of this passage.

## Beginning and Ending

As we will see, Genesis 2:4-17 and 3:22-24 stand in sharp contrast with each other in at least three important ways.

The first contrast is in location. The account begins in 2:7 with God placing Adam within the paradise garden. Adam lived and worked in a place full of divine blessings; wonderful vegetation, life-giving water, precious metals and stones surrounded him on every side. By contrast, the narrative ends in 3:24 with God expelling Adam and Eve from the garden. This geographical contrast makes it clear that the most desirable place for human beings to be on earth was in the Garden of Eden.

A second difference in the focus in each section is on the special trees of the garden. Although 2:4-17 mentions two trees, the Tree of Life and the Tree of the Knowledge of Good and Evil, by the time we come to 2:17 attention moves just to the one tree, the Tree of Knowledge. This tree held the power to give human beings the experiential knowledge of goodness and sin. It could open their eyes to see things they had not seen before.

By contrast, at the end of the narrative in 3:22-24, God was no longer concerned with the Tree of the Knowledge of Good and Evil, but exclusively with the Tree of Life.

This tree had the power to give human beings eternal life. But God banished Adam and denied access to this tree. This contrast made it clear that free access humanity once had to the garden, and all of the blessings that were there, had been lost until God decreed otherwise.

A third difference between the beginning and ending of our narrative is in humanity's commission. In 2:15 the first step reports that God commissioned Adam to blessed work in the garden with no pain and no difficulty. In 3:23, however, God banished Adam and Eve from the garden and condemned them to difficult toil outside of the garden. This contrast also provides an essential perspective on the story. Not only did humanity lose the wonder of life in Eden, we were also condemned to difficulty so long as we remained away from the garden.

These three contrasts between the opening and closing sections of Genesis 2–3 draw our attention to some of the most vital aspects of this narrative. Moses wrote about a major shift in the human condition that took place in primeval times. God originally ordained that human beings should dwell in his garden, but Adam and Eve's sin bound them to difficulty and trouble, and separated them from the tree that gives eternal life. Now, as we will see, this set of contrasts spoke directly to the situation in which the Israelites found themselves as Moses led them toward the Promised Land. The Israelites had been far from Eden as they suffered under the cruelty of slavery in Egypt. They needed to regain the blessings which God provided in Eden.

## Middle Portions

With the contrasting symmetries of the outer portions of the story in mind, we should turn our attention to the middle portions of the story, 2:18-25 and 3:1-21. These two inner steps fill in the gap between the beginning and ending and they form their own set of contrasting symmetries in at least three ways.

One contrast focuses on humanity's relationship with God. In the second step we see a harmonious relationship between Adam and God. In 2:18 God expressed concern for Adam and brought Adam a perfect partner in Eve. The picture here is that of God and the human race in intimacy and at peace. Yet, in the third portion of the narrative, disharmony replaces the initial harmony between God and the human race. Adam and Eve disobeyed God's command, and in 3:8 they hid from God's approach, and God spoke angrily against Adam and Eve.

A second contrast exists in human relationships. In the second step of 2:18-25, Adam and Eve were in perfect bliss. In 2:23 Adam broke forth with the first love poem in the Bible, saying that Eve was "bone of my bones, and flesh of my flesh," and they lived together naked and without shame. By contrast, however, in 3:16 God pronounced a curse on this relationship, declaring that strife would persist between the man and woman. The woman would desire her husband, and he would rule over her. These words revealed that the sin of Adam and Eve not only disrupted their relationship with God, but with each other as well. And from that point forward, human relationships have been characterized by difficulty and struggle.

A third contrast appears in humanity's relationship with evil. In the second step, evil is absent from the story. Adam and Eve were entirely innocent and separated from

the power of evil. But by the third section, humanity had fallen prey to the serpent and was locked into a long-term struggle with evil. In 3:15 God promised that Eve's seed would one day overcome the serpent, but no immediate victory was offered to Adam and Eve.

These contrasts between the second and third portions of the narrative help us see a number of concerns which Moses had as he wrote this narrative. Moses wrote about Adam and Eve in ways that connected to Israel's experience. Sin continued to wreak havoc in Israel's life. It damaged the peoples' relationship with God and with each other, and more than this, every day of hardship they endured reminded Moses and Israel that, just like Adam and Eve, they had to wait for the time when God would finally give victory over evil to his people.

With the literary structure of this material in mind, we are able to delve into the original meaning of this passage. Why did Moses write this account of humanity's expulsion from God's garden? What message was he conveying to the nation of Israel as he led them toward the Promised Land?

## ORIGINAL MEANING

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Now, to be sure, on a very basic level, Moses wrote this narrative to teach some general theological themes to the Israelites whom he led. He told them a lot about the origin, and the nature, and the results of sin in the world. And these were very important themes. Yet, as we saw in the previous lesson, Moses did not write his primeval history simply to inform Israel about such general historical and theological issues. Instead, like many other ancient writers, Moses wrote his primeval history to give his people practical instruction about current religious and social programs, mainly, in this case, leaving Egypt and going to Canaan.

To see how Moses connected the primeval Garden of Eden and Israel's conquest of Canaan, we will look at three elements of his story: first, Moses' portrait of the Garden of Eden; second, his focus on the requirement of loyalty from Adam and Eve; and third, his depiction of the curses placed on Adam and Eve. Let's look first at Moses' description of the Garden of Eden.

## GARDEN

Moses' description of the garden is so complex that many of our modern questions about Eden will always remain unanswered. Yet, it is possible for us to grasp the central concerns in Moses' presentation. As we will see, Moses described the Garden of Eden in ways that identified Eden with the Promised Land. From Moses' perspective, the land to which he was leading Israel in his day was actually the location of the primeval land called Eden.

Many aspects of Genesis 2–3 make it clear that Moses wanted Israel to connect Canaan with the land of Eden, but two features of his account are particularly important:

first, the identity of Eden; and second, the holiness of Eden. Let's look first at the identity of Eden.

## Identity

In Genesis 2:10-14 we read these words:

**A river watering the garden flowed from Eden; from there it was separated into four headwaters. The name of the first is the Pishon; it winds through the entire land of Havilah, where there is gold... The name of the second river is the Gihon; it winds through the entire land of Cush. The name of the third river is the Tigris; it runs along the east side of Asshur. And the fourth river is the Euphrates (Genesis 2:10-14).**

Moses wrote that a single river flowed from Eden and divided into four headwaters. These headwaters were the Pishon, the Gihon, the Tigris, and Euphrates Rivers. One central river in Eden fed into these four rivers. It was their central source.

Now, as we explore Moses' description here, we must always remember that many geographical changes have taken place throughout our planet's history since the beginning of the world. Even in Moses' day there was no longer a single river which fed these four headwaters. The Scriptures teach that this central source of water will appear only in the end of time. Yet, Moses' reference to the four rivers which were fed by this central source gives us an approximate picture of where he believed Eden had been located.

We can identify the Tigris and Euphrates mentioned in 2:14 with the region of the modern day Tigris and Euphrates Rivers. The fact that Genesis refers to these rivers has suggested to most modern interpreters that Genesis agrees with Babylonian mythology, that Eden was in the region of Mesopotamia. In the Babylonian language, *edin* means "a plain," or "open flatland," a term well suited for the lower Tigris-Euphrates region. In Hebrew, however, *eden* does not mean "a plain". It means "a pleasant or delightful place." So, Moses was not using the Babylonian word at all. He used a Hebrew word that sounded like the Babylonian word for Eden, but his concept of this place was not the same. In fact, the account of Genesis explicitly states that Eden was not limited to Mesopotamia. As we saw in Genesis 2:10, the Tigris and Euphrates flowed from a greater river which was located in Eden. We read in verse 10:

**A river watering the garden flowed from Eden; from there it was separated into four headwaters (Genesis 2:10).**

This passage teaches that the river of Eden fed the Tigris and Euphrates, not that Eden was limited to the Tigris-Euphrates region. Moses mentioned the Tigris and Euphrates to provide a general orientation toward the eastern most extent of Eden. The great rivers in the east marked the eastern boundary region of Eden.



This outlook is confirmed by the locations of the other rivers mentioned in Genesis 2. In 2:11, 13 Moses mentioned another pair of rivers. He wrote that the river of Eden fed the Pishon, which winds through the Havilah, and it also fed the Gihon, which winds through the entire land of Cush. In the Old Testament, the lands of Havilah and Cush are often associated with the region of Egypt. We cannot be sure precisely how Moses understood these rivers in relation to the great river Nile, but it is safe to say that he pointed to the region of northern Egypt as the western border of Eden.

So we can see, in Moses' outlook, Eden was no small place. It was a large area extending from the Tigris-Euphrates to the border of Egypt — nearly all of the region that we now call the Fertile Crescent. Within this pleasant place was a special garden, the Garden of Eden, the centerpiece of the large territory of Eden.

At first, Moses' identification of Eden with the Fertile Crescent may not seem very important. But in reality, it is critical to understanding the significance of Eden for Israel as Moses wrote the book of Genesis. Elsewhere in the book of Genesis, Moses referred back to Genesis 2 to teach Israel that the land of Eden, the Fertile Crescent, was the land God promised to Israel, the land to which he was taking them. This perspective became especially clear when God spoke to Abraham in Genesis 15:18. Listen to the way God described the borders of the Promised Land in this passage:

**On that day the Lord made a covenant with Abram and said, “To your descendants I give this land, from the river of Egypt to the great river, the Euphrates” (Genesis 15:18).**

We see here on the one hand that God promised Abraham that his land would extend to the Tigris-Euphrates region, and it would also reach to “the river of Egypt.” Many interpreters have suggested that “the river of Egypt” may refer not to the Nile itself, but to a smaller river in the Sinai border region of Egypt. In all events, it is evident that this verse alludes to the geographical boundaries of Eden as they appear in Genesis 2. This allusion to Genesis 2 makes it clear that Moses believed God had promised Abraham and his descendants the land that was once known as the land of Eden. From Moses' point of view, as Israel moved toward Canaan, they actually moved toward the location of the primeval land of Eden.

In order to highlight the importance of Israel going to Eden, Moses stressed the holy character of that place. He pointed to the holiness of Eden to teach Israel that the Promised Land to which he was leading them was the place where they could receive the blessing of entering into the special presence of God.

## Holiness

The primary way in which Moses conveyed the holiness of Eden was to describe it in terms that he also used to describe the tabernacle. Although God is omnipresent, and lives in every place in a general sense, Moses built a tabernacle where God came in a special way to meet with his people, and at this tabernacle God would display his presence, give his law, receive the worship of his people and bless them with his favor. So, when Moses depicted the Garden of Eden in terms which he also used to describe the

tabernacle, he revealed that Eden, and thus Canaan, was the place of God's special presence on earth. There, Israel could receive the great blessings of God.

At least seven aspects of Eden indicate that it was a holy place of God's special presence, much like the tabernacle. First, in 3:8 Moses used a special expression when he said that God "was walking in the garden." The Hebrew expression translated "walking" is *mit halek* (מִתְהַלֵּךְ). This terminology is significant because it is one of the special ways in which Moses described God's presence at the tabernacle in Leviticus 26:12 and other passages.

Second, in 2:9 we read about the Tree of Life as a central feature of the Garden of Eden. This sacramental tree held the power to give eternal life to those who ate from it. And although the Bible does not say this explicitly, recent archaeological research has noted that many sites in the ancient world had stylized images of the Tree of Life in sacred places. This evidence strongly suggests that the menorah, the seven-pronged lampstand of Moses' tabernacle, was most likely a stylized representation of the Tree of Life. In this way, the Garden of Eden is shown to be the original holy place on earth.

A third way in which Moses noted the holiness of Eden was his focus on gold and onyx in the region. In 2:12 we learn that gold and onyx were bountiful in the region of Eden. As we might expect, Exodus 25–40 mention gold and onyx as important parts of the tabernacle construction.

A fourth connection between the Garden of Eden and the tabernacle is the presence of cherubim or angels. According to 3:24, God placed cherubim in the Garden of Eden to guard against access to the Tree of Life. In a similar way, cherubim appear throughout the decorations of the tabernacle in passages such as Exodus 25:18 and 37:9. These cherubim reminded Israel not only of the angels in heaven, but also the angels guarding the holy place in Eden.

Fifth, we read in 3:24 that the entrance of Eden was "in the east," that is, on the eastern side. This fact may seem insignificant until we realize that according to Exodus 27:13 and a number of other passages, the main entrance for the tabernacle was also on the eastern side. This was the case with most temples in the Ancient Near East. Once again, Eden is shown to be a holy dwelling of God.

Sixth, Moses spoke of Adam's service in Eden with language that he used elsewhere for Levitical service in the tabernacle. In 2:15 Moses described Adam's responsibility in the garden in this way:

**[God] put him in the Garden of Eden to work it and take care of it (Genesis 2:15).**

These terms also appear together in Numbers 3:7-8 and 8:26. There, Moses described the work of the Levites in the tabernacle using the same expressions. Adam and Eve served as priests in the Garden of Eden.

Seventh, it is significant that the formation of the Garden of Eden took place after the six days of creation. As we saw in the preceding lesson, the six days of creation climaxed in God's Sabbath observance in Genesis 2:1-3. Interestingly enough, according to Exodus 24:16 and following, Moses spent six days on the mountain with God, and God gave him the instructions to build the tabernacle on the seventh day.

These seven features of Eden show that Moses considered the Garden of Eden to be a holy place much like the tabernacle. It was the location of God's special presence in the world. And to be near that place was to near the blessings of God.

As we have already seen, Moses believed that Canaan was the location of Eden. As a result, in focusing on the holy character of Eden, Moses was also drawing attention to the holy character of Canaan. To be near Canaan was to be near the place God ordained from the beginning as his holy dwelling. One of the best passages for seeing Moses' teaching about this future holy place is Deuteronomy 12:10-11. There he wrote these words:

**You will cross the Jordan and settle in the land the Lord your God is giving you as an inheritance, and he will give you rest from all your enemies around you so that you will live in safety. Then to the place the Lord your God will choose as a dwelling for his Name — there you are to bring everything I command you: your burnt offerings and sacrifices, your tithes and special gifts, and all the choice possessions you have vowed to the Lord (Deuteronomy 12:10-11).**

This passage reveals one of the central features of Moses' vision of the land of Canaan. He emphasized that one day Canaan would be the location of the permanent dwelling for the presence of God — the temple for Yahweh.

To be sure, the land of Canaan in Moses' day was a mere shadow of what Eden had originally been. Even when Solomon built the temple in Jerusalem, the Promised Land was still not entirely redeemed from sin nor restored to its original perfection. Yet, as Moses wrote about the holiness of Eden, he held before the Israelites the vision of what their land could be one day. To reach the Promised Land was to move into the vicinity of Eden, the place of God's holy presence on earth. Just as God placed Adam and Eve in the wonderful temple garden in the beginning, God was now bringing Israel to Canaan, and once they dwelled in that land, the nation would begin to experience the blessings of living in the special presence of God.

Now that we have seen how Moses set forth Adam and Eve's blessings in Eden as a prototype of the grace that awaited Israel in the Promised Land, we are in a position to look at a second topic in Genesis 2–3: God's test of Adam and Eve's loyalty. This motif plays a crucial role in Moses' presentation.

## LOYALTY

The theme of loyalty was crucial to Moses' story about Eden. Although Eden was a place of tremendous blessing, it was also the location which required moral responsibility. Moses emphasized this fact because he wanted the Israelites to remember that the Promised Land to which they were going also required Israel to be loyal to God's commands.

To understand why Moses emphasized this theme, we need to explore two issues: the requirement of loyalty in the Garden of Eden, and the requirement of loyalty in

Canaan. Let's look first at the loyalty God expected of Adam and Eve in the Garden of Eden.

## In Eden

The motif of loyalty in the garden appears very early in Genesis 2 and it reappears time and again throughout chapters 2 and 3. And in many respects, it is the central theme of these chapters. Listen to the way God challenged Adam to fidelity in Genesis 2:16-17:

**You are free to eat from any tree in the garden; but you must not eat from the tree of the knowledge of good and evil, for when you eat of it you will surely die (Genesis 2:16-17).**

Now, it is not altogether clear why God restricted our first parents from this particular tree; after all, knowing good and evil is prized in other parts of Scripture. Yet, despite this uncertainty, it is clear that God was testing Adam and Eve to see if they would be loyal to him. If Adam and Eve were obedient, they would receive even greater blessings from God. But if they proved defiant, they would suffer God's judgment. Eden was a holy place, and the people living there had to be holy as well.

## In Canaan

By focusing on the test of loyalty in the Garden of Eden, Moses stressed a parallel requirement of loyalty for the Israelites whom he led toward the Promised Land. As Moses led Israel toward the Promised Land, he frequently warned them that God required them to be faithful to him. Moses succinctly summarized his teaching on this matter in the eighth chapter of Deuteronomy. We read these words in Deuteronomy 8:1:

**Be careful to follow every command I am giving you today, so that you may live and increase and may enter and possess the land that the Lord promised on oath to your forefathers (Deuteronomy 8:1).**

From this passage it is clear that God required Israel to be loyal to him in order that they might enter and possess the land of Canaan. In fact, all through the wilderness wanderings of the nation, God tested the Israelites to teach them how to be holy. In Deuteronomy 8:2 we read these words:

**Remember how the Lord your God led you all the way in the desert these forty years, to humble you and to test you in order to know what was in your heart, whether or not you would keep his commands (Deuteronomy 8:2).**

Beyond this, Moses also made it clear that once the nation of Israel came to the holy land, they had to remain loyal to God or they would lose this privilege. Listen to the way he put it in Deuteronomy 8:10-20:

**When you have eaten and are satisfied, praise the Lord your God for the good land he has given you. Be careful that you do not forget the Lord your God, failing to observe his commands, his laws and his decrees that I am giving you this day... If you ever forget the Lord your God and follow other gods and worship and bow down to them, I testify against you today that you will surely be destroyed. Like the nations the Lord destroyed before you, so you will be destroyed for not obeying the Lord your God (Deuteronomy 8:10-20).**

Moses knew that the Israelites were prone to rebel against God's commands, just like Adam and Eve. And because of these tendencies, Moses focused on Adam and Eve's test in the garden to warn that God required loyalty of everyone who wished to dwell in Canaan. Of course, God did not require perfection from Israel, and it was only by God's grace that anyone was able to remain faithful. Yet, if Israel flagrantly violated the laws of God and turned away from him, like Adam and Eve did in the garden, they would not be able to enjoy the blessings of the Promised Land. As Moses encouraged Israel to move forward toward the Land of Promise, he was concerned that they remember this feature of life in the land.

With the teaching of Deuteronomy 8 in mind, we can see Moses' main reason for focusing on the loyalty required of Adam and Eve. He stressed this matter to inspire the Israelites to reverse what Adam and Eve had done by remaining faithful to the commands of God. Adam and Eve were tested in the garden and were driven out because they sinned. In Moses' day, Israel was still outside the Garden of Eden, but God tested them to prepare the nation to re-enter Eden and to dwell there in God's blessing.

So we see that Moses wrote about the test of loyalty in the Garden of Eden, he not only explained to Israel what had happened long ago in the primeval days of Adam and Eve. He also explained what was happening in his own day. God was offering to Israel the wonderful blessing of life in the Garden of Eden. Yet, just like with Adam and Eve, they could not enjoy these blessings unless they were loyal to God. Moses was calling Israel to live by faith as a holy people, fully devoted to the commands of God. Only then could they hope to enter the land and stay there in peace.

So far we have seen how Moses portrayed the land of Eden and the land of Canaan as the place of God's blessing on earth, and we have also seen how he conveyed the idea that both lands required loyal service from those who dwelled within them. Now we are going to focus on a third dimension of the original meaning of Genesis 2 and 3 for Israel: the consequences of Adam and Eve's disloyalty.

## CONSEQUENCES

To see the consequences of infidelity in the garden, we will look at three results of Adam and Eve's sin: death, pain, and exclusion.

## Death

In the first place, Moses explained that God threatened Adam and Eve with death as a consequence of sin. This motif first appears in God's warning to Adam in Genesis 2:17. There, God said:

**“You must not eat from the tree of the knowledge of good and evil, for when you eat of it you will surely die” (Genesis 2:17).**

The words “you will surely die” comprise a phrase that indicates the certainty of the death to come. This grammatical construction is very similar to the way Moses' law threatened capital punishment. When Mosaic Law threatened capital punishment against perpetrators of serious crimes, Moses declared, “he will surely die,” or “they will surely die.” The legal context of these passages strongly suggests that these expressions were formulaic ways of declaring a death sentence. God was not saying that Adam and Eve would die immediately, but that death would certainly follow sin.

In this light we may understand God's threat to Adam in Genesis 2:17 as stating that Adam would come under a sentence of death. He would be condemned to die. Moses certainly wrote of this consequence of Adam's sin to explain how death came into the world, but his purpose was also more directly related to the experience of the Israelites to whom he wrote. They were well acquainted with death. Moses' readers had seen most of the first generation leaving Egypt die in the wilderness, because they rebelled against God. As Moses wrote in Numbers 26:65:

**The Lord had told those Israelites they would surely die in the desert, and not one of them was left except Caleb the son of Jephunneh and Joshua the son of Nun (Numbers 26:65).**

Once again, we see the language “they would surely die” which alludes to the law of Moses, and the account of Adam and Eve in the garden.

In this respect, the Israelites, hearing the story of Adam and Eve, could connect their experience of death in the wilderness with Adam and Eve's violation of God's command. The consequences of infidelity to the command of God in the garden had been a sentence of death on humanity's first parents. And the same sentence still stood over the Israelites who proved to be severely unfaithful to the commands of God in Moses' day.

## Pain

When we read the account of Genesis, it is clear that death did not come immediately to Adam and Eve. God first confined Adam and Eve to an existence characterized by pain. On the one hand, we read these words in Genesis 3:16:

**To the woman he said, “I will greatly increase your pains in childbearing; with pain you will give birth to children” (Genesis 3:16).**

On the other hand, God also afflicted Adam with painful living. We read these words to Adam in Genesis 3:17:

**Cursed is the ground because of you; through painful toil you will eat of it all the days of your life (Genesis 3:17).**

Of all the things that Moses could have said about the consequences of sin in the garden, this twofold focus on human pain fit well with his purpose in writing this account to Israel. They had experienced the kinds of pain mentioned here as they remained outside the land of Canaan. But listen to the way Moses described life in the Promised Land. In Deuteronomy 11:10-12 we read these words:

**The land you are entering to take over is not like the land of Egypt, from which you have come, where you planted your seed and irrigated it by foot as in a vegetable garden. But the land you are crossing the Jordan to take possession of is a land of mountains and valleys that drinks rain from heaven. It is a land the Lord your God cares for; the eyes of the Lord your God are continually on it from the beginning of the year to its end (Deuteronomy 11:10-12).**

In short, Moses was taking Israel to a place where the pain they had experienced outside of Canaan would be relieved. Consequently, when Moses wrote of the pain that came to Adam and Eve, he called his Israelite readers to avoid infidelity, which resulted in pain, and to be faithful to the Lord, so they could return to Canaan and could experience the joy of life in the blessings of God.

## **Exclusion**

A third effect of Adam and Eve’s disloyalty appears in 3:22. Consider the words of Genesis 3:22:

**And the Lord God said, “The man has now become like one of us, knowing good and evil. He must not be allowed to reach out his hand and take also from the tree of life and eat, and live forever” (Genesis 3:22).**

This passage makes it clear that the Tree of Life was able to make humanity “live forever.” It was the final answer to the problem of pain and death. Yet, God did not want Adam and Eve to eat at this time. They were excluded from the garden and its Tree of Life.

It is important for us to remember that access to the Tree of Life was not forbidden to humanity forever. The rest of Scripture makes it clear that those who are



faithful to God will eventually be able to eat from this tree. Listen to what the apostle John said about the Tree of Life in Revelation 2:7:

**To him who overcomes, I will give the right to eat from the tree of life, which is in the paradise of God (Revelation 2:7).**

Now John spoke of the end of time when Christ returns to earth. Yet, his words explain why Moses wrote about this tree to Israel. When Adam and Eve had sinned, God had blocked the way to the Tree of Life, but in Moses' day, God was opening the way for Israel to receive at least a foretaste of the blessing of life as they returned to the land of Canaan. Listen to the way Moses put it in Deuteronomy 30:19-20:

**This day I call heaven and earth as witnesses against you that I have set before you life and death, blessings and curses. Now choose life, so that you and your children may live and that you may love the Lord your God, listen to his voice, and hold fast to him. For the Lord is your life, and he will give you many years in the land he swore to give to your fathers, Abraham, Isaac and Jacob (Deuteronomy 30:19-20).**

If the Israelites would be faithful to God they would have the opportunity to receive long life and happiness in the land of Canaan.

Just as Adam and Eve lost access to the Tree of Life, in Moses' day, God was offering Israel a partial taste of the blessing of the life found there. This experience of life was not the full measure of the eternal life that we know when Christ returns. Yet, it would have been a partial foretaste of what was to come in Christ. Moses offered Israel the opportunity to enjoy the blessing of long life in the Land of Promise.

So we have seen that the story of Adam and Eve's rebellion in the Garden of Eden was much more than an account of the origin of sin in the world. By drawing connections between Eden and Canaan, Moses taught his Israelite readers about their own lives as well. They learned how wonderful the Land of Promise could be for them.

Now that we have seen the literary structure and the original meaning of Genesis 2–3, we are ready to ask a third question. How does the New Testament teach us to apply this passage today?

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## MODERN APPLICATION

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It is clear to us that Moses wrote this passage to encourage his Israelite readers to avoid the mistakes of Adam and Eve, and to move back into paradise by entering Canaan. But what do these instructions to Israel have to do with us today? Put simply, just as Moses used the story of sin in the garden to encourage Israel to retrace and reverse the steps of Adam so that they could find the salvation of living in paradise once again, the writers of the New Testament taught that salvation in Christ is also a return to paradise.



We will explore the New Testament's use of Genesis 2–3 in relation to Christ in our usual fashion by focusing on the three phases of Christ's kingdom. We will begin by looking at how this passage is applied to the inauguration of the kingdom in the first coming of Christ, and then we will see how it speaks to our lives in the continuation of the kingdom of God today. And finally, we will see that the New Testament draws upon this passage as it teaches about the consummation of Christ's kingdom in his second coming. Let's look first at the inauguration of the kingdom.

## INAUGURATION

One way in which the New Testament speaks of the salvation Christ brings to the world is in his earthly ministry. In the inauguration of the kingdom Christ retraced and reversed what Adam and Eve had done in the Garden of Eden. In his earthly ministry, Christ fulfilled God's commands where Adam and Eve failed. We will investigate this aspect of New Testament teaching by looking first at how this theme appears in Paul's letters, and second, how it appears in the gospel of Matthew. Let's begin with Paul's outlook.

### Paul

Paul summarized his viewpoint succinctly in Romans 5:14. There he wrote:

**Death reigned from the time of Adam to the time of Moses, even over those who did not sin by breaking a command, as did Adam, who was a pattern of the one to come (Romans 5:14).**

Notice that Paul said Adam was a type of one to come. The rest of Romans 5 makes it clear that "the one to come" was Christ. Listen to the way Paul summarized the matter in Romans 5:18-19:

**Just as the result of one trespass was condemnation for all men, so also the result of one act of righteousness was justification that brings life for all men. For just as through the disobedience of the one man the many were made sinners, so also through the obedience of the one man the many will be made righteous (Romans 5:18-19).**

Notice how Paul put it here. Adam's one trespass resulted in condemnation for all people, but Christ's one act of righteousness resulted in justification for all men. Why was this so? Because the disobedience of the one man, Adam, made us sinners. But the obedience of the one man, Christ, made us righteous.

This teaching is familiar to most Christians. As Moses taught in Genesis 2–3, Adam was just one man, but his actions had consequences for all who are identified with him. Adam's sin brought death to the entire human race because he was our federal or

covenant representative before God. As a result of Adam's sin, we are all born outside the paradise of God's blessing and under the curse of death. But at the same time, the New Testament teaches Christ is the federal or covenant representative of everyone who has faith in him. In contrast with Adam's disobedience, however, Christ's obedience to God brings righteousness and life to all who are counted in him.

From this teaching we learn something very important about applying the story of Adam's sin to our lives. The only way for paradise lost to be found again is through the righteous obedience of Christ. We cannot enter the paradise of salvation as individuals standing on our own merits before God. We need an absolutely perfect representative to enter paradise before us, and Christ is that representative. We find the salvation of eternal life in God's presence only because Christ was fully obedient to the Father. In his earthly ministry, Jesus earned the right to enter into paradise, and only those who place their faith in him may enter along with him.

Paul's correlation between Adam and Christ was shared by other New Testament writers as well. Let's consider how this theme appears in the gospel of Matthew.

## Matthew

Matthew in particular drew attention to the way Christ retraced and reversed Adam's sin in his account of Christ's temptation in Matthew 4:1-11 (the parallel passage of which is found in Luke 4:1-13).

In a number of different ways, the story of Christ's temptation parallels both the experience of Adam and Eve in the garden, and the challenge Moses brought to the Israelites as he wrote about Adam and Eve. In the first place, the location of Christ's temptation connects it with Israel as the Israelites followed Moses. According to Matthew 4:1, Jesus was led by the Spirit into the desert, just as God had led Israel into the desert. It was in the wilderness that God tested Israel to see if she would be obedient, and Christ was tested in the wilderness also.

Second, the length of time Jesus spent in the wilderness paralleled the experience of Israel. Just as Israel was in the wilderness for forty years, according to Matthew 4:2, Christ was in the wilderness for forty days.

Third, hunger was an important feature in Christ's temptation. In Matthew 4:3 Satan tempted Christ to turn the stones into bread. This dimension of Christ's temptation paralleled the testing of Israel over water and food in the wilderness.

Fourth, Jesus himself connected his experience with Israel's testing in the wilderness in the ways that he used the Scriptures. In Matthew 4:4 Jesus quoted Deuteronomy 8:3. In Matthew 4:7 he quoted Deuteronomy 6:16, and in Matthew 4:10 he referred to Deuteronomy 6:13. These Old Testament passages come from portions of Deuteronomy where Moses described Israel's test in the wilderness. By quoting these passages, Jesus directly connected his experience of temptation with that of the testing of the nation of Israel.

So we see that Matthew's account of the temptation of Jesus connects to the message which Moses originally gave to Israel through Genesis 2-3. Through his active obedience, Jesus succeeded where Adam and Israel both failed. Christ was faithful to the commands of God. This is why Jesus said those well-known words found in Luke 23:43.

Just as Israel faced her trials in the wilderness to prepare her for entry into the paradise of Canaan, Luke 23:43 records that on the cross Jesus told the repentant thief these words:

**I tell you the truth, today you will be with me in paradise (Luke 23:43).**

Christ's reward for his righteousness was eternal life in paradise.

So we see that the New Testament relates the temptation of Adam and Eve, as well as the testing of Israel in the wilderness to the inauguration of the kingdom in Christ's earthly ministry. Christ was the last Adam who succeeded where the first Adam failed. Moreover, Christ overcame temptation in the wilderness, reversing Israel's failure. And for this reason, he entered eternal paradise.

Now that we have seen how the New Testament relates Moses' account of Adam and Eve in the garden to the first coming of Christ, we should move to our second concern: How does the New Testament apply these principles to the continuation of the kingdom, the time in which we now live?

## CONTINUATION

Several passages in the New Testament stand out in this regard. But we will look at only two: first, Paul's focus on these chapters of Genesis, and second, the way James wrote about these issues.

### Paul

Let's look first at Paul's words in 2 Corinthians 11:3:

**But I am afraid that just as Eve was deceived by the serpent's cunning, your minds may somehow be led astray from your sincere and pure devotion to Christ (2 Corinthians 11:3).**

As Paul continued in this chapter, he explained that he was deeply concerned that the Corinthians would turn to another gospel. We see here that Paul appealed to Eve's negative example to warn against the worst kind of disloyalty — turning from the true gospel of Christ. Just as Moses used the story of Eve's temptation to warn Israel to move faithfully toward the Promised Land, Paul used the same story to warn believers in his day about the basic loyalty required of all who follow Christ. During the continuation of the kingdom, many people in the visible church face the danger of turning away from essential truths of the gospel. The church must guard against this rank apostasy because the consequences are as horrible as they were for Adam and Eve.

## James

James took a posture similar to Paul's as he explained the role of testing and trials in the Christian life. In James 1:12-15 we read these words:

**Blessed is the man who perseveres under trial, because when he has stood the test, he will receive the crown of life that God has promised to those who love him... each one is tempted when, by his own evil desire, he is dragged away and enticed. Then, after desire has conceived, it gives birth to sin; and sin, when it is full-grown, gives birth to death (James 1:12-15).**

It is clear that James alluded to Genesis 2–3. In 1:14 he focused on human “desire” as the power behind enticement to sin, and it was Eve’s desire for the Tree of the Knowledge of Good and Evil that caused her to sin.

Second, James explained that those who pass the test will “receive the crown of life.” By contrast the result of sin is that it “gives birth to death.” The contrast here between life and death parallels the contrast between life and death in the story of Adam and Eve.

Just as Moses encouraged faithfulness in Israel during the trials in the wilderness by appealing to the temptation of Adam and Eve, Paul and James encouraged us to fidelity during the trials of the continuation of the kingdom. Tests during the Christian life reveal our true character and prepare us for eternal life. By God’s grace, we must do all we can to remain faithful to Christ so that we may be honored with the gift of eternal life in paradise.

Having seen how the New Testament applies the story of Adam and Eve in the Garden to the inauguration and continuation of the kingdom, we should turn our attention to the final stage, the consummation of salvation in Christ at his second coming.

## CONSUMMATION

This theme also appears many places in the New Testament, but we will touch on only two passages: one in Romans and another in the book of Revelation.

## Romans

In the first place, listen to the way Paul gave hope to the believers in Rome as he closed his epistle to them. In Romans 16:20 he wrote these words:

**The God of peace will soon crush Satan under your feet. The grace of our Lord Jesus be with you (Romans 16:20).**

In these words, Paul reminded the Roman Christians of their great hope in the second coming of Christ. But he did so by referring back to the promise of salvation in Genesis 3.

As we have seen earlier in this lesson, in Genesis 3:15 God told the serpent that one day Eve's seed, the human race, would crush the head of the seed of the serpent. In this passage Paul said that Satan will be crushed under the feet of Christians when Christ returns. Christ himself will destroy Satan and our powerful enemy, death. Then we will reign with Christ in victory and glory.

## Revelation

Another place in the New Testament where the themes of Genesis 2–3 are related to the consummation of the kingdom is the book of Revelation. John referred to the Tree of Life on a number of occasions in this book. Listen to the way John put the matter in Revelation 2:7:

**He who has an ear, let him hear what the Spirit says to the churches.  
To him who overcomes, I will give the right to eat from the tree of life,  
which is in the paradise of God (Revelation 2:7).**

The allusion to Genesis 3 here is obvious. We know that Adam and Eve were expelled from the Garden of Eden precisely to keep them from eating of the Tree of Life. Yet, when Christ returns, God will give his people the right to eat from the Tree of Life. Notice also where this tree is located. John explicitly said that it is “in the paradise of God.” Just as Moses called Israel to enter Canaan because long life could be found there, Christians have as their hope entering an even greater, more fully restored paradise.

In the third place, we see another connection with Genesis in the identification of those who will eat from the tree. John said that the right will be given “to him who overcomes.” Just as Moses spoke of the Tree of Life to encourage Israel to be faithful to God, John explained that only the one who overcomes sin by remaining loyal will be able to eat from the Tree of Life.

Finally, we should look at Revelation 22:1-2. As John looked ahead to the new world, this is what he saw:

**Then the angel showed me the river of the water of life, as clear as crystal, flowing from the throne of God and of the Lamb down the middle of the great street of the city. On each side of the river stood the tree of life, bearing twelve crops of fruit, yielding its fruit every month. And the leaves of the tree are for the healing of the nations (Revelation 22:1-2).**

The perspective of the New Testament is plain. When Christ returns to consummate his kingdom, those who trust Christ will enter the paradise of Eden. Satan will be crushed under our feet and we will eat from the Tree of Life and live forever in God's new creation.

## CONCLUSION

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We have seen in this lesson that Moses wrote about Adam and Eve in the garden to help the Israelites as they moved toward the Promised Land. He called the nation to retrace and to reverse the events in the Garden of Eden. In many respects, the message of this passage is very similar for us today. By hearing Moses' call to Israel to move forward toward the Promised Land, we can see how we too must retrace and reverse the steps of Adam and Eve. By trusting and remaining faithful to Christ, we will discover the salvation of paradise, lost and found.

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# The Primeval History

LESSON  
THREE

## A WORLD OF VIOLENCE



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# Contents

<b>I. Introduction.....</b>	<b>1</b>
<b>II. Literary Structure.....</b>	<b>1</b>
A. Early Violence and Hope	2
1. Narratives	2
2. Genealogies	3
B. Later Violence and Hope	4
1. Sons of God	4
2. Nephilim	5
3. Afterword	6
<b>III. Original Meaning.....</b>	<b>7</b>
A. Connections	7
1. Early Violence and Hope	7
a. Narratives	7
b. Genealogies	10
2. Later Violence and Hope	13
B. Implications	14
<b>IV. Modern Application.....</b>	<b>15</b>
A. Inauguration	15
1. Violence	15
2. Deliverance	16
B. Continuation	17
1. Continuing Violence	17
2. Continuing Faith	18
C. Consummation	18
1. End of Violence	18
2. Final Deliverance	19
<b>V. Conclusion .....</b>	<b>19</b>

# **The Primeval History**

## **Lesson Three**

### **A World of Violence**

#### **INTRODUCTION**

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Have you ever noticed how young children often go fearlessly into dangerous situations? They walk into the middle of the street without a care in the world. They pick up sharp knives without caution. And sometimes they even go right up to strangers, take their hands, and start to walk off with them — completely oblivious to the violence other people can pose.

But of course, adults know that the world is full of all kinds of trouble. Natural disasters destroy life and property. Diseases bring suffering. Machines can harm us. And we know that perhaps the greatest dangers of all are those posed by other people. Men and women commit violent acts of assault, murder, and war on their fellow human beings. If we are aware of human history, or if we are just paying attention to current events, it is nearly impossible to deny that human beings have filled this world with violence.

We have entitled this lesson, “A World of Violence,” and we are going to look at Genesis 4:1–6:8 where Moses described the troubles and violence that took place in the world shortly after humanity’s fall into sin. In these chapters, Moses described how human beings began to fill the world with violence, and how God reacted to those troubles. We will examine three aspects of this portion of Genesis: first, we will look at the literary structure of this material; second, we will focus on the original meaning of these chapters; and third, we will explore how the New Testament teaches us to apply these passages in our own day. Let’s look first at the literary structure of Genesis 4:1–6:8.

#### **LITERARY STRUCTURE**

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These chapters in Genesis touch on a number of different topics, and include both narratives and genealogies. Now, these complexities often leave us with the impression that the chapters don’t fit together very well. But when we examine this portion of Genesis more closely, we’ll see that it is a carefully crafted literary work with a unified purpose. As we look at Genesis 4:1–6:8, we will see that this portion of Genesis divides into two main sections. The first section consists of 4:1–5:32, and we have entitled it “early violence and hope.” The second section consists of 6:1–8, and we have called it “later violence and hope.”

## EARLY VIOLENCE AND HOPE

The early scenario of violence and hope of deliverance in Genesis 4–5 divides into four parts, and these parts form two parallel sets of narratives and genealogies: 4:1-16 forms a narrative which parallels a second narrative in 4:25-26, and 4:17-24 forms a genealogy which corresponds to a second genealogy in 5:1-32. We will examine these materials by exploring some of the relationships between the corresponding narratives, and then we will give attention to the parallels between the two genealogies.

### Narratives

In the first place, Moses began by writing a story about sinful Cain in 4:1-16. This passage is the well-known record of the time when Cain broke into a fit of jealous rage and murdered his brother Abel. When we look more closely at this passage, it becomes apparent that it divides into five dramatic steps. The story begins with Cain and Abel living together harmoniously in verses 1-2a. Even so, when we turn to the end of the narrative in verse 16, we find a very different circumstance. Cain is alone, banished from the good land, from his family and from God's special presence.

The second step of the story, found in verses 2b-7, touches on the events that led Cain to murder Abel, specifically the distinction between the sacrifices each offered to God. Put simply, God was pleased with Abel's sacrifice, but he rejected Cain's sacrifice. God also warned Cain about the power of sin seeking to master him, but Cain paid no attention.

The third section of this narrative, verse 8, forms the turning point of this story. In this section, Cain murdered his brother Abel. Cain and Abel went away from the place of sacrifice into a field, and there, just as God had warned, sin mastered Cain and turned him into the first murderer in human history.

The fourth section of this narrative appears in verses 9-15 and describes the curse and protection God gave to Cain. God placed a curse on Cain by banishing him to wander far from the land of Eden, but he also protected him from being attacked by other people.

So we see that Genesis 4–5 begin with the story of Cain's terrible sin. He was so corrupted by sin that he actually murdered his righteous brother Abel, and as a result, he was destined to live far from the place of God's blessing.

Now that we have seen the structure of the opening narrative of Genesis 4–5, we should turn to the second narrative which appears in these chapters, the corresponding account in 4:25-26. This passage turns attention away from sinful Cain to Adam's third son, righteous Seth.

The report of righteous Seth divides into three short steps. First, in 4:25, Eve gives birth to Seth. The second step in this report appears in 4:26a where Moses noted that Seth also had a son, Enosh. Nothing much is made of this event, but Moses followed his report of Enosh's birth with a third step in 4:26b, where he added a telling comment on the spiritual character of this family. In 4:26b Moses wrote these words:

**At that time men began to call on the name of the Lord (Genesis 4:26b).**

Put simply, Seth and Enosh were men who called out to God in prayer. In contrast with sinful Cain, these men were righteous before God, and they demonstrated this righteousness through faithful worship and prayer.

## Genealogies

With the basic contrasts of these parallel narratives in mind, we should now turn to the parallel genealogies in chapters 4–5. The genealogies of Genesis 4–5 often seem to be little more than obscure records of biological descent, and for this reason, many interpreters overlook their importance. Yet, a closer look at the genealogies reveals that they contain vital information that served Moses' purposes in writing this portion of his primeval history.

On the one hand, the first genealogy records Cain's sinful lineage in 4:17-24. In these verses, Moses listed a number of Cain's descendants and reflected on how sin had turned this family into a proud, boastful, and threatening clan.

The second genealogy consists of Seth's righteous lineage in 5:1-32. In this passage, Moses recorded a number of important names in Seth's family. Yet, in contrast with the line of Cain, this family continued to be righteous and faithful.

One of the ways we can see this intention is to notice the way Moses included two names in both lists. Both Cain's genealogy and the lineage of Seth contain the names Enoch and Lamech, and Moses explicitly contrasted these men with each other. Consider first what Moses said about the two men named Enoch. On the one side, in Genesis 4:17 we read these words about Cain's descendant Enoch:

**Cain was then building a city, and he named it after his son Enoch (Genesis 4:17).**

Cain and his son Enoch exalted themselves in great pride by naming the city after Enoch. We can see the significance of this comment when we notice what Moses wrote about the Enoch of Seth's line. In 5:24, Moses commented on Seth's Enoch in this way:

**Enoch walked with God; then he was no more, because God took him away (Genesis 5:24).**

It would be hard to imagine a more striking contrast between two men than we find here between the sinful Enoch and the righteous Enoch.

In addition to the contrasts set up between the two men named Enoch, Moses also mentioned a Lamech in Cain's line and a Lamech in Seth's line. Once again, strong contrasts stand out between these two men. On the one hand, Cain's Lamech was a horrible figure. Genesis 4:23-24 report that Lamech was a murderer, and took great pride in his murderous exploits.

By contrast, to display the character of Seth's Lamech, Moses recorded Lamech's words at the birth of his son in 5:29:

**[Lamech] named him Noah and said, “He will comfort us in the labor and painful toil of our hands caused by the ground the Lord has cursed” (Genesis 5:29).**

As was the custom in biblical times, Seth’s Lamech named his son as a prayer to God, expressing the hope that his son Noah would bring deliverance from the terrible condition of life which began when God cursed the ground in the days of Adam and Eve.

Now that we have noticed how Genesis 4–5 convey a pattern of early violence and hope of deliverance, we should turn to the second scenario of violence and hope as it appears in Genesis 6:1-8.

### **LATER VIOLENCE AND HOPE**

When we look more closely at these verses, it becomes apparent that 6:1-8 divide into three steps: first, verses 1-3 concern characters known as the “sons of God.” Second, verses 4-7 focus on other characters known as the “Nephilim.” Following these two steps, Moses added an afterword in verse 8 mentioning Noah once again, the man in whom there was hope of deliverance.

#### **Sons of God**

The two main steps of these verses describe a series of threatening events that took place on earth, and then reveal how God reacted to these events. Let’s look first at the threat of the sons of God and at God’s reaction in 6:1-3.

Unfortunately, these verses are among the most difficult to interpret in the book of Genesis. The difficulty primarily centers on verse 2 where we read these words:

**The sons of God saw that the daughters of men were beautiful, and they married any of them they chose (Genesis 6:2).**

Moses did not explain precisely who these sons of God and daughters of men were. Apparently, he expected his original readers to understand what he meant. But it has been impossible for modern readers to settle the identities of these characters beyond question.

In the history of interpretation, three reasonable identifications have been suggested. First, the sons of God may be Sethites who married women descended from Cain. This interpretation has some merit because of the contrasts set up between the Cainites and Sethites in chapters 4–5 of Genesis. A second option is that the sons of God may be angels, and the daughters of men were mere humans. This view also has some merit because angels are often called “sons of God” in the Old Testament in passages like Job 1:6 and Psalm 29:1. A third option is to understand the sons of God as kings or noblemen who took peasant women. This outlook has merit as well, because in the Ancient Near East kings were often called sons of God, just as the son of David is called

God's son in 2 Samuel 7:14 and in Psalm 2:7. Although I favor this third interpretation, we should not be dogmatic about any particular position.

Even though we cannot be sure who these characters were, we can be more certain of what they did. You will recall that in Genesis 6:2 we read that:

**The sons of God ... married any of [the daughters of men] they chose (Genesis 6:2).**

This is not ordinary language in the Old Testament for legitimate marriage, and it strongly suggests that neither the women nor their families consented to these relationships. Rather, the sons of God, who may have been powerful noblemen, forcefully took women without their consent. The language here may even mean that the sons of God actually raped these women at will. In all events, the violence exemplified earlier in the exploits of Cain and his descendants reached another area of life — the violation of women.

After Moses described the threat of the sons of God, he turned to his main concern — God's reaction to these events. We read these words in Genesis 6:3:

**My Spirit will not contend with man forever, for he is mortal; his days will be a hundred and twenty years (Genesis 6:3).**

God grew tired of the ways sin continued to bring violence to the human race, and declared that he would not tolerate this corruption forever. Nevertheless, God graciously determined to allow humanity another hundred and twenty years before executing his judgment.

A second set of actions on earth and divine reaction appears in Genesis 6:4-7, the account of the Nephilim.

## Nephilim

In verse 4 we first read about another threatening circumstance that developed:

**The Nephilim were on the earth in those days — and also afterward — when the sons of God went to the daughters of men and had children by them. They were the heroes of old, men of renown (Genesis 6:4).**

Now, some older Bibles simply follow the Septuagint and translate the Hebrew word “Nephilim” as “giants.” But this translation is unfortunate because it does not convey the connotations of the word. Scholarly opinion is divided over the precise meaning of the term, but it is most likely that it refers to strong warriors or warlords.

In this passage, Moses specifically described these Nephilim as “heroes of old, men of renown.” The term “heroes,” or *hagiborim* (הַגִּבּוֹרִים) in Hebrew, denotes warriors or powerful soldiers. In this context, the military notoriety of the Nephilim should be taken negatively. These men were known for their exploitative warfare and violence as

they inflicted terror on those around them. The violence that began when Cain killed his brother Abel, and continued in Cain's descendant Lamech, had now reached even greater proportions as the Nephilim soldiers threatened violence at every turn. As we read in verse 5:

**The Lord saw how great man's wickedness on the earth had become, and that every inclination of the thoughts of his heart was only evil all the time (Genesis 6:5).**

With the appearance of the Nephilim, the corruption of the human race had grown to such proportions that sin utterly dominated humanity. As a result, we read in verses 6-7 that:

**The Lord was grieved that he had made man on the earth, and his heart was filled with pain. So the Lord said, "I will wipe mankind, whom I have created, from the face of the earth — men and animals, and creatures that move along the ground, and birds of the air — for I am grieved that I have made them" (Genesis 6:6-7).**

God saw how the Nephilim terrorized his world, and determined that it was time to intervene with massive, worldwide destruction.

## **Afterword**

Happily, Genesis 6:1-8 do not end with words of judgment. Instead, in keeping with the overarching patterns of this portion of his primeval history, Moses added an afterword of hope in verse 8. There we read that even though God determined to destroy humanity because of the corruption of sin, there was one man who provided hope:

**Noah found favor in the eyes of the Lord (Genesis 6:8).**

In these few words, Moses completed the scenario of threat and hope of deliverance. The destruction of violent, sinful humanity through the flood would actually result in a deliverance for future generations.

From our explorations of the literary structures of Genesis 4:1–6:8, we see that these chapters in Genesis focus on two major issues: first, they focus on the threat of violence from those who rebelled against God in the days of Cain and his descendants; second, they focus on the threat of sinful people in the days of the sons of God and the Nephilim. In both cases, however, Moses indicated that God would bring deliverance through the one special son of Seth, the man named Noah.

Now that we have seen the basic structure and central concerns of this portion of Genesis, we are in a position to ask a second question. What was the original meaning of these chapters? What was Moses communicating to the Israelites as he led them from Egypt to the Promised Land?

## ORIGINAL MEANING

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To grasp the original meaning of this portion of the primeval history, it will help to consider two matters: first, we will see how Moses connected this portion of his primeval history to Israel's experience; and second, we will explore the implications of these connections for Moses' original Israelite readers. Let's look first at the ways Moses connected these chapters to the experiences of the Israelites whom he was leading.

### CONNECTIONS

Moses related these chapters of his primeval history to his contemporary world by describing the violence of early human history in ways that closely resembled the experiences of violence which Israel had endured. By doing so, he pointed out that the troubles which Israel faced were very similar to the troubles of the primeval world.

Now, to explore how Moses established these similarities, we will look once again at the two major sections of Genesis 4:1–6:8: the first scenario of early violence and hope of deliverance in chapters 4–5, and the second scenario of later violence and hope of deliverance in 6:1-8. Let's look first at how Genesis 4–5 connected to Israel's experience.

### Early Violence and Hope

As we look at the characteristics of the wicked and righteous in Genesis 4–5, it becomes apparent that Moses shaped this material so that his readers would associate Cain and his family with the Egyptians, and so that they would associate righteous Abel, Seth, and the Sethites with themselves as the people of God. Now, how did Moses build these connections?

***Narratives.*** We should begin by examining the story of sinful Cain in Genesis 4:1-16. In this story, Moses focused on at least five concerns that allowed the Israelites to connect this passage to their own day. In the first place, Moses mentioned the occupations of Cain and Abel to create these associations.

Listen to the way Cain and Abel were initially distinguished in Genesis 4:2:

**Now Abel kept flocks, and Cain worked the soil (Genesis 4:2).**

As this passage indicates, Cain was a settled agriculturalist, a farmer, while Abel was a shepherd. In ancient and modern times, it has been common for tensions to arise between settled, agriculturally-based societies and nomadic shepherds. And as the book of Genesis itself indicates, Moses and the Israelites were quite aware of this kind of tension and how it led to serious trials while they were in Egypt. In Genesis 46:33-34, Joseph instructed his brothers in this way when they came to Egypt:



**When Pharaoh calls you in and asks, “What is your occupation?” you should answer, “Your servants have tended livestock from our boyhood on, just as our fathers did.” Then you will be allowed to settle in the region of Goshen, for all shepherds are detestable to the Egyptians (Genesis 46:33-34).**

Joseph’s instructions here give us insight into why Moses mentioned that Cain was a farmer and Abel a shepherd. He wanted his Israelite readers to associate Cain, the agriculturalist, with the Egyptians, and he wanted Israel to associate themselves with Abel, the victimized shepherd.

A second connection between this story and Moses’ original audience appears in the motif of the sacrifices offered by Cain and Abel. As Genesis 4 tells us, God rejected Cain’s sacrifice but was pleased with Abel’s sacrifice. The reason for God’s distinction between these sacrifices is made explicit in Genesis 4:3-4, where we read these words:

**Cain brought some of the fruits of the soil as an offering to the Lord. But Abel brought fat portions from some of the firstborn of his flock (Genesis 4:3-4).**

Notice the way Moses described the sacrifices. In verse 3 he said that Cain offered “some of the fruits of the soil,” but in verse 4 he wrote that Abel offered “fat portions from some of the firstborn of his flock.” This distinction is very important. Cain simply brought whatever fruits of his field he happened to gather. His worship was nominal at best because he did not reserve the best of his crop for God. But Abel fulfilled the law of God with a sincere heart by bringing the fat portions (which were highly prized for Old Testament sacrifices) from among the firstborn of his flocks (which were the most highly prized animals according to the Law of Moses). Cain’s sacrifice was little more than an insincere ritual. But by contrast, Abel offered sincere devotion to God.

Moses also used this distinction between the sacrifices of Cain and Abel to draw further associations with the Egyptians and Israel. This background is striking when we remember that Moses first approached Pharaoh to ask for the release of Israel because he wanted to offer sacrifices to Yahweh. As we read in Exodus 5:3, Moses and Aaron said these words to Pharaoh:

**The God of the Hebrews has met with us. Now let us take a three-day journey into the desert to offer sacrifices to the Lord our God (Exodus 5:3).**

But Pharaoh refused their request. As Moses recorded in verse 4, Pharaoh told them:

**“Moses and Aaron, why are you taking the people away from their labor? Get back to your work!” (Exodus 5:4).**

So we see that just as Cain had dishonored God with his nominal sacrifices, the Egyptians did not offer true worship to Israel’s God. Yet, just as Abel offered sincere and

acceptable sacrifices, so the Israelites sought the true worship of Yahweh. In this way, Moses established another association of Egypt with Cain, and of Israel with Abel.

A third way Moses created connections with Israel's experience was through the motif of murder. Cain murdered his brother Abel, and the significance of this event becomes evident when we remember the murders of the Israelites that took place in Egypt. In Exodus 1–2 we read that the Egyptians not only overworked the Israelites, but actively murdered many of them, including their infant children. In this way Moses developed still more associations between Cain and the Egyptians, as well as between Abel and the Israelites.

A fourth way in which Moses created these associations was by describing Cain's location on the earth. When God cursed Cain for murdering Abel, he banished Cain from the fertile land. As we read in Genesis 4:11-12:

**Now you are under a curse and driven from the ground... When you work the ground, it will no longer yield its crops for you (Genesis 4:11-12).**

Cain was cursed to live in places where his farming would yield very little produce. This description of Cain's location fit nicely with Moses' assessment of the land of Egypt and of the land where he was taking Israel. Listen to the way Moses contrasted Canaan and Egypt in Deuteronomy 11:10-12:

**The land you are entering to take over is not like the land of Egypt, from which you have come, where you planted your seed and irrigated it by foot as in a vegetable garden. But the land you are crossing the Jordan to take possession of is a land of mountains and valleys that drinks rain from heaven. It is a land the Lord your God cares for (Deuteronomy 11:10-12).**

God sent Cain to a place far from Eden, to a place like Egypt, where farming required much effort. This fact was another way in which Moses' Israelite readers were to associate Cain with the Egyptians.

A fifth way in which Genesis 4–5 connected Cain with Egypt and Abel with Israel was in the theme of Cain's protection. Even though Cain killed his brother Abel, God still protected him from harm. We read these words from God in Genesis 4:15:

**If anyone kills Cain, he will suffer vengeance seven times over (Genesis 4:15).**

God protected Cain from harm even though he was a murderer. Once again, we see that Moses described these events so that Israel would associate them with their own experience in Egypt. God had given great protection to Egypt. Even though they were murderous and deserved divine judgment, for a long time God extended special protection to Egypt.

So, we see that in at least five ways Moses established meaningful parallels between this primeval period and Israel's exodus experience. The themes of occupations,

worship, murder, location, and protection all indicate that Moses wanted his Israelite readers to apply this story to their lives by associating Cain with the Egyptians, and by associating Abel with themselves as the people of God.

Now that we have seen the associations established in the story of sinful Cain, we should turn to the parallel narrative concerning righteous Seth in Genesis 4:25-26.

As we have seen, Moses made one significant comment about Seth and his son, Enosh. In Genesis 4:26 we read these words:

**At that time men began to call on the name of the Lord (Genesis 4:26).**

Moses mentioned this fact about Seth and his son so that his readers would identify themselves not only with Abel, but also with Seth, Adam's son who replaced Abel.

In the first place, Seth used the divine name Yahweh, and this use associated him with Israel. Interestingly enough, the book of Exodus makes it clear that the name Yahweh rose to prominence in the days of Moses. For example, God spoke to Moses in this way in Exodus 3:15:

**Say to the Israelites, “The Lord [in Hebrew, ‘Yahweh’], the God of your fathers — the God of Abraham, the God of Isaac and the God of Jacob — has sent me to you.” This is my name forever, the name by which I am to be remembered from generation to generation (Exodus 3:15).**

Although the biblical record indicates that the name Yahweh was used from the time of Seth, during the time of Moses, this name became the principal name used for God. For this reason, faithful Israelites under Moses' leadership would have associated themselves with righteous Seth. Like him, they also cherished the name Yahweh.

In the second place, the Israelites should have associated themselves with Seth through the theme of prayer. This motif also appears in Genesis 4:26 where Moses wrote that Seth's family “began to call on the name of the Lord.” In the Old Testament, “to call on the name of the Lord” often meant to cry out for divine help in a time of trouble or need. In this light we can see that Moses drew a second connection to Israel in his own times. From the rest of the Pentateuch, we learn that in the Exodus from Egypt, Israel called on Yahweh for help during many crises, much like Seth and Enosh had called on him.

So we see that the Moses designed the narratives about sinful Cain and righteous Seth to form parallels with his contemporary world. He wanted his readers to notice that the Egyptians were like Cain. He also wanted his readers to see that they themselves were like Abel and Seth.

With these basic connections in mind we are in a position to turn to the genealogy of Cain and the genealogy of Seth.

**Genealogies.** As we will see, Moses also shaped these genealogies so that the Israelites would continue to associate the Egyptians with the wicked and themselves with the righteous. To further his main purpose, Genesis 4:17-24 characterizes the line of Cain in ways that drew indisputable associations with Egypt. These connections appear in at

least six ways. First, Moses focused on Cain as a city builder. As he wrote in Genesis 4:17:

**Cain was then building a city (Genesis 4:17).**

Needless to say, the Israelites knew all too well that the Egyptians were great city builders — building cities for the Egyptians had been part of what the Israelites did as they were slaves in Egypt. For this reason, these words about Cain would have created strong associations with the Egyptians.

Second, we should also take note of the name of Cain's city. Again, in Genesis 4:17, we read these words:

**Cain was then building a city, and he named it after his son Enoch (Genesis 4:17).**

For Israelites in the days of Moses, this fact reminded them of an Egyptian practice. As Moses reported in Exodus 1:11:

**[The Egyptians] put slave masters over [the Israelites] to oppress them with forced labor, and they built Pithom and Rameses as store cities for Pharaoh (Exodus 1:11).**

The city Rameses was named in honor of the Pharaoh Rameses. Just like Cain, the Egyptians also named cities after themselves for their own glory and honor. In this way, Cain's genealogy established another connection between Cain and the Egyptians.

A third association between Cain's line and Egypt appears in the pride which Cain's descendant Lamech took in his act of murder. In 4:23 we read that Lamech actually sang a song of praise to himself before his wives:

**Adah and Zillah, listen to me;  
wives of Lamech, hear my words.  
I have killed a man for wounding me (Genesis 4:23).**

Lamech's boasting of his atrocities should also have associated Lamech with the Egyptians in the minds of ancient Israelites. The Israelites would have been quite aware that many ancient Egyptian inscriptions praised the Pharaohs and their armies for their murderous exploits.

A fourth association appears in Moses' attention to the death of children. Listen again to what Lamech said. In 4:23 we read:

**I have killed a man for wounding me,  
a young man for injuring me (Genesis 4:23).**

The Hebrew term translated "young man" here is *yeled* (יָלֵד), which is often translated simply "boy." One of Lamech's victims was in all likelihood little more than a child. As we all know, in the first chapter of the book of Exodus, Pharaoh ordered the death of

Israelite boys. Like Cain's Lamech, the Egyptians struck out against the defenseless of Israel, against their male children.

A fifth association between Cain's family and the Egyptians appears in Lamech's claim to increased protection. In Genesis 4:24, Lamech claimed to enjoy even more protection than Cain:

**If Cain is avenged seven times,  
then Lamech seventy-seven times (Genesis 4:24).**

Just as Lamech thought that God protected him, the Pharaohs of Egypt were confident of protection from their gods. As a matter of fact, it had certainly appeared for many years that the Egyptians enjoyed more and more protection from harm.

In the sixth place, we should note the cultural sophistication of Cain's line. Listen to the ways these three Cainite brothers, Jabal, Jubal, and Tubal-Cain are described in Genesis 4:20-22:

**Jabal ... was the father of those who live in tents and raise livestock...  
Jubal ... was the father of all who play the harp and flute... Tubal-  
Cain ... forged all kinds of tools out of bronze and iron (Genesis 4:20-  
22).**

With these words, Moses characterized Cain's family as very sophisticated. Jabal was no mere shepherd; he invented animal husbandry. Jubal invented music, and Tubal-Cain invented sophisticated metallurgy. It would have been very difficult for Israelites in Moses' day to have missed this connection. Compared to the simple, nomadic lifestyles of Israel's patriarchs, the culture of Egypt was highly sophisticated. Moses described the sinful line of Cain this way to confirm the association he wanted his readers to make between Cain's lineage and the Egyptians.

So we see that in at least six ways Moses drew connections between the Cainite genealogy and the Egyptians. His descriptions of city building, naming cities, pride in murder, violence against children, divine protection, and cultural sophistication in Cain's family were designed to create these connections.

Now we should turn to the genealogy of Seth in Genesis 5:1-32. As we might expect, Moses constructed the Sethite genealogy so that his Israelite readers would identify themselves with Seth's lineage. This association was built on at least four factors. In the first place, we should note that on a biological level, the nation of Israel descended from the line of Seth. In Genesis 5:32 we read the names of Noah's three sons:

**After Noah was 500 years old, he became the father of Shem, Ham  
and Japheth (Genesis 5:32).**

The name Shem was particularly important to Moses because Shem was the ancestor of Israel. In modern languages we derive the term "Semitic" or "Semite" from the name Shem. Although other nations also came from the seed of Shem, the Israelites were God's special chosen people, and they were from among the descendants of Shem.

So, in this simple biological sense, Moses connected his Israelite readers with Seth's genealogy.

A second association between Seth's line and Israel appears in the repeated focus on the righteousness of Seth's descendants. Seth's line is characterized as faithful and righteous. For instance, according to Genesis 5:24:

**Enoch walked with God; then he was no more (Genesis 5:24).**

In the Hebrew Bible, the expression translated "walked with God" only occurs with reference to Enoch and Noah. Yet, time and again, especially in the book of Deuteronomy, Moses told Israel that they were to be like Enoch by walking in the ways of Yahweh. In this way, the faithful Israelites following Moses found another point of identification with the line of Seth. It was their goal to be like Enoch.

A third connection between Seth's genealogy and Israel's experience appears in Moses' emphasis on the numbers of Sethites. In Seth's genealogy, we learn that his descendants became quite numerous. Moses brought out the numerical increase of Seth's family by repeating the fact that "other sons and daughters" were born to the Sethites. In fact he wrote this comment nine times in Genesis 5. This emphasis on numbers of people in Seth's line was significant for Moses' Israelite readers because they knew that God had greatly blessed them numerically while in Egypt and during the Exodus.

In the fourth place, Moses also stressed the long lives that many Sethites enjoyed in order to connect Israel with the Sethites. For example, we all know that Seth's descendant Methuselah lived longer than anyone in biblical history. According to Genesis 5:27, he lived 969 years. Many other Sethites lived long lives as well. Moses' attention to the long lives of Seth's line was important because, as the law of Moses indicates, long life in the Land of Promise was to be the goal of the faithful in Israel. By pointing out the long lives of Seth's descendants, Moses drew another connection between the Sethites and Israel.

So it is that Moses wrote about the early violence and hope of deliverance in the primeval history in order to draw firm associations with his contemporary world. Cain and his descendants were to be connected with the Egyptians who inflicted violence on Israel. And Abel, Seth, and Seth's descendants were to be connected with the Israelites who were victims of Egyptian violence. These associations were at the heart of Moses' strategy in this portion of his history.

Now that we have seen how Moses handled his record of early violence and hope, we should turn briefly to Genesis 6:1-8 — later violence and the hope of deliverance.

## **Later Violence and Hope**

Let's look especially at 6:4 where Moses described these men:

**The Nephilim were on the earth in those days — and also afterward — when the sons of God went to the daughters of men and had children by them. They were the heroes of old, men of renown (Genesis 6:4).**

We have already noted that the Nephilim were mighty warriors, well-known for their exploits. But notice that Moses made an important comment about the Nephilim. He said that the Nephilim existed on the earth in the primeval days “and also afterward.”

By adding this allusion to Nephilim warriors living after the flood, Moses reminded his Israelite readers that they had encountered Nephilim in their recent history. The only other place where the term Nephilim appears in the Bible is in Numbers 13:32-33. There, the spies Moses sent into Canaan reported seeing Nephilim. They said these words:

**The land we explored devours those living in it... We saw the Nephilim there... We seemed like grasshoppers in our own eyes, and we looked the same to them (Numbers 13:32-33).**

The unfaithful spies reported that the land of Canaan was a terribly violent and threatening place, and that among the inhabitants of Canaan were Nephilim, vicious warriors who struck fear into their hearts. Unfortunately, this report led the first generation following Moses to turn away from God’s call to conquest. And God was so disturbed by this lack of faith that he sent the Israelites into the wilderness to wander aimlessly until the first generation had died off and a new generation was prepared to take up the cause of conquest.

In this light we can understand how Moses drew another strong connection between this portion of his primeval history and the experience of Israel. He wanted his Israelite readers to associate the primeval Nephilim of Genesis 6 with the terrifying Nephilim warriors of Canaan. In this way, the violence and hope of deliverance in Genesis 6:1-8 spoke directly to the threat of violence in the conquest of Canaan.

So far in our examination of the original meaning of Genesis 4:1–6:8 we have seen the primeval characters associated with people in Israel’s contemporary experience. Now we should ask a second question: What were the implications of these associations for the people of Israel as they followed Moses toward the Promised Land?

## IMPLICATIONS

To understand the heart of Moses’ message to Israel, we need to remember the basic scenario that appears twice in this material. You will recall that Genesis 4:1–6:8 contains two scenarios of violence and hope of deliverance; 4:1–5:32 focused on the violence of Cain and his descendants. Yet, 5:29 and 32 mention Noah in order to indicate that deliverance would come through him. In much the same way, just as Genesis 6:1-8 reports the violence of the sons of God and the Nephilim, Genesis 6:8 mentions Noah once again to indicate that God intended to deliver from these threats as well.

For the Israelites following Moses, these scenarios should have been good news. They revealed what God had already done for them and what he was about to do for them. On the one hand, just as God had used Noah to deliver Israel’s ancestors from the Cainites, he had already used Moses to deliver the Israelites from the Egyptians. On the other hand, just as God had used Noah to bring deliverance from the primeval Nephilim,

he was about to use Moses to deliver the Israelites as they faced the threat of Nephilim in the land of Canaan.

Now that we have seen the structure and the original meaning of Genesis 4:1–6:8, we should turn to our final topic: modern application. How does the New Testament teach us to apply this portion of Moses' primeval history to our modern lives?

## MODERN APPLICATION

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In our usual fashion, we will explore how the New Testament elaborates on these themes in terms of the three stages of Christ's kingdom: first, the inauguration of the kingdom, which took place when Christ first came to this earth; second, the continuation of the kingdom, which extends throughout the history of the church; and third, the consummation of the kingdom, when Christ returns in glory and brings the new heavens and new earth. These phases of Christ's kingdom should be explored separately to reach a fuller understanding of the ways violence and deliverance apply to Christians today. Let's look first at the motifs of violence and hope of deliverance in the inauguration of the kingdom.

### INAUGURATION

The inauguration of the kingdom in Christ's first coming recalls the world of violence in the primeval history in at least two ways: first, we see connections with the violence Jesus suffered while on earth; and second, we find connections with the deliverance which Jesus brought to his people. Let's look first at the suffering Jesus experienced in his first coming.

### Violence

Anyone familiar with the life of Jesus knows that Jesus suffered persecution from the world in many ways. As he ministered to the downtrodden, he bore their grief and pain. Yet, there can be no doubt that according to the New Testament, the climax of violence perpetrated against Christ was his death on the cross. By suffering one of the worst forms of execution known in his day, Jesus actually experienced a fate worse than that suffered by the righteous in the primeval times.

In this light it is not surprising that one way the New Testament describes the suffering of Jesus is to compare his death on the cross to the violence of the primeval world, or to be more specific, to the death of Abel. The writer of Hebrews knew that Christ had suffered innocently at the hands of wicked men, and for this reason, he compared Christ's death to Abel's death in 12:23-24 of his epistle:



**You have come to God, the judge of all men, to the spirits of righteous men made perfect, to Jesus the mediator of a new covenant, and to the sprinkled blood that speaks a better word than the blood of Abel (Hebrews 12:23-24).**

The allusion here to Moses' primeval history is clear. Christ's shed blood spoke a better or greater word than the blood of Abel. That is to say, Christ's death was even more significant in the eyes of God than the death of Abel was. Jesus' death was no ordinary event. His death atoned for the sins of his people because he suffered in the place of everyone who believes in him. But beyond this, Christ's death stirred the just wrath of God more greatly than had the blood of Abel.

In this light, when we read Moses' account of the violence of the primeval history, we should not simply take note of why Moses wrote these chapters for his original Israelite readers. From the New Testament perspective, we should also see that the violence inflicted on the righteous in the primeval history anticipated the suffering of Christ in the inauguration of the kingdom.

Now that we have seen how the New Testament draws connections between the primeval world of violence and Christ's suffering, we should turn to a second way the inauguration of the kingdom touches this portion of Genesis. A significant link also occurs in the hope of deliverance Jesus brought to the world.

## **Deliverance**

Jesus spent most of his public ministry proclaiming a message of hope — the gospel, the message that one day the suffering of life would be over for those who followed him. Jesus' devotion to this gospel message appears throughout his teachings. But consider how prominent the message of deliverance appears in the Beatitudes, the opening statements of blessing in the Sermon on the Mount. As Jesus began this well-known sermon, he said these words in Matthew 5:10-12:

**Blessed are those who are persecuted because of righteousness, for theirs is the kingdom of heaven. Blessed are you when people insult you, persecute you and falsely say all kinds of evil against you because of me. Rejoice and be glad, because great is your reward in heaven (Matthew 5:10-12).**

These Beatitudes reveal that one of the central concerns of Jesus' teaching ministry was to bring the hopeful message that God had not deserted his people. Jesus encouraged his followers to have hope that God would one day deliver them from all suffering.

But Jesus did not simply teach the good news of hope for deliverance — through his death and resurrection he actually accomplished the deliverance which he announced. Because Jesus was the perfect son of David, his death made atonement for the sins of God's people. His death paid the price for sin so that his followers would no longer have to fear the terror of death. As we read in Hebrews 2:14-15, Jesus died so that:

**... by his death he might destroy him who holds the power of death — that is, the devil — and free those who all their lives were held in slavery by their fear of death (Hebrews 2:14-15).**

So we see that the themes of violence and hope of deliverance readily apply to the inauguration of the kingdom in Christ. As Moses wrote to acknowledge the threats against Israel and to teach Israel about the power of God to deliver, the New Testament reveals that Christ came to suffer violence and to bring deliverance for his people from the power of wickedness in the world.

Now that we have seen some of the ways that the New Testament links Jesus' first coming to the primeval history, we should also notice how the New Testament applies this portion of primeval history to the continuation of the kingdom, the time between the first and second comings of Christ.

## **CONTINUATION**

There are at least two ways in which the New Testament explains how the continuation of the kingdom touches on the themes of Genesis 4:1–6:8, and these references provide basic guidance as we apply this portion of Scripture to the Christian church. On the one hand, the New Testament teaches that we should expect a continuation of violence against the people of God, and on the other hand we are encouraged to endure these difficult times by continuing to have faith in Christ for deliverance. Consider first the fact that we should expect violence against Christ's followers.

### **Continuing Violence**

On a number of occasions Jesus taught that his followers would suffer hatred and persecution from the world. But in Matthew 23:34-35, Jesus himself drew attention to the fact that this suffering was connected to the suffering of the righteous in the primeval world. Jesus said this to the Pharisees:

**I am sending you prophets and wise men and teachers. Some of them you will kill and crucify; others you will flog in your synagogues and pursue from town to town. And so upon you will come all the righteous blood that has been shed on earth, from the blood of righteous Abel to the blood of Zechariah son of Berekiah (Matthew 23:34-35).**

Jesus predicted that when he sent followers into the world, they would be severely persecuted. But notice also how Jesus connected this prediction with the primeval history. He said that the violence to come against his followers would continue the pattern of

violence that reached all the way back to the blood of righteous Abel whom Cain murdered.

## Continuing Faith

When we realize that followers of Christ will always suffer persecution during the continuation of the kingdom, we can also see the importance of maintaining our faith in Christ. The writer of Hebrews touched on this matter in chapter 11 of his epistle. We read these words in 11:4:

**By faith Abel offered God a better sacrifice than Cain did. By faith he was commended as a righteous man, when God spoke well of his offerings. And by faith he still speaks, even though he is dead (Hebrews 11:4).**

The main idea in this passage is that followers of Christ throughout the ages must follow the example of Abel. Although Abel's righteousness brought him trouble from his wicked brother, Abel stands as an example of faithfulness for all believers to follow even in our day.

So we see that the themes of violence and deliverance in the primeval history also apply to followers of Christ during the continuation of the kingdom. On one side, we should be ready to suffer opposition and violence in our age. But on the other side, as we endure these times of hardship, we will overcome only as we are faithful, and hope that Christ will deliver us one day.

Having seen how the themes of violence and deliverance fit within the inauguration and continuation of the kingdom, we should turn to the final stage of the kingdom of Christ, his second coming.

## CONSUMMATION

Put simply, the New Testament teaches that at the return of Christ, we will see an end of violence against the people of God and we will experience a final deliverance to a world of everlasting blessing.

## End of Violence

The end of violence is a central aspect of the New Testament portrait of the consummation. When Christ returns, he will bring about a wholesale renewal of the creation, free of all violence. Listen to the way the apostle John described the return of Christ in Revelation 21:1-5:

**Then I saw a new heaven and a new earth, for the first heaven and the first earth had passed away... And I heard a loud voice from the throne saying... “God himself will be with them and be their God. He will wipe every tear from their eyes. There will be no more death or mourning or crying or pain, for the old order of things has passed away.” He who was seated on the throne said, “I am making everything new!” (Revelation 21:1-5).**

## **Final Deliverance**

At the same time, however, the consummation of Christ’s kingdom will not simply bring violence to an end. When he returns, he will grant endless blessings of life and peace to his people. Our deliverance will be full and final. In Revelation 22:1-2 we read this description of our final deliverance:

**Then the angel showed me the river of the water of life, as clear as crystal, flowing from the throne of God and of the Lamb down the middle of the great street of the city. On each side of the river stood the tree of life, bearing twelve crops of fruit, yielding its fruit every month. And the leaves of the tree are for the healing of the nations (Revelation 22:1-2).**

This hope of final deliverance in the second coming of Christ appears throughout the New Testament. It expresses the pinnacle of Christian belief. We long for the day when the trials and difficulties of this world will be replaced by the life-giving wonders of the world to come. Suffering will be exchanged for joy. Struggle will be exchanged for victory. And death will be exchanged for everlasting life.

So we see that just as Moses wrote about the primeval world of violence to encourage Israel to move forward toward Canaan, the New Testament teaches us to yearn for the new world to come at the consummation. When Christ returns, all who have trusted him will see an end to violence, and they will inherit a full and glorious deliverance into an eternal world of salvation.

## **CONCLUSION**

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In this lesson we have looked at several aspects of the primeval world of violence described in Genesis 4:1–6:8. We have noted the structure of this portion of Genesis. We have also seen how Moses originally wrote this material to encourage the Israelites who followed him toward Canaan. And we have also learned that as Christians we must apply this portion of the primeval history to our New Testament faith.

When we look at this portion of Genesis as Moses originally intended it for Israel, it becomes much more than a mere record of the past. Instead, we can see that as God

delivered from violence in the primeval world, and as he later delivered Israel in Moses' day, we can increase our hope that Christ will one day deliver us from this world of violence as well.

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# The Primeval History

LESSON  
FOUR

## THE RIGHT DIRECTION



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# Contents

<b>I. Introduction.....</b>	<b>1</b>
<b>II. Literary Structure.....</b>	<b>1</b>
A. Flood of Deliverance	2
1. Initial Covenant	2
2. Enduring Covenant	2
3. Escape from Water	3
4. Exit to Dry Land	3
5. Divine Remembrance	3
B. New Order	4
1. Sons of Noah	4
2. Defeat of Babel	5
<b>III. Original Meaning.....</b>	<b>6</b>
A. Flood of Deliverance	6
1. Connections	7
2. Implications	8
B. Noah's Sons	8
1. Canaan	8
2. Conflict	9
3. Implications	10
C. Defeat of Babel	10
1. City	11
2. Victory	11
3. Implications	12
<b>IV. Modern Application.....</b>	<b>13</b>
A. Inauguration	14
1. Covenant	14
2. Victory	15
B. Continuation	15
1. Baptism	15
2. Spiritual Warfare	16
C. Consummation	17
1. Final Cataclysm	17
2. Final Battle	18
<b>V. Conclusion .....</b>	<b>19</b>

# **The Primeval History**

## **Lesson Four**

### **The Right Direction**

#### **INTRODUCTION**

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I recall a time when I was teaching in the Ukraine, and had only a few minutes to reach my destination by Metro. I rushed to the station, ran down the stairs and jumped on the train just as the doors were closing. It was going to be a ride all the way across town, so I sat back to catch my breath and relaxed for a few minutes. Then after a while it suddenly dawned on me. I had taken the train going in the wrong direction! Now naturally, the next metro station was miles away, and it took forever to reach it. By the time I got turned around and started back, it was clear that I was going to be very late. I can remember thinking to myself, “Well, this situation isn’t all I had hoped it would be, but at least now I’m going in the right direction.”

I guess that’s the way it is in most areas of life. Our situations are never perfect, and most of the time they’re not even close. We face lots of problems and challenges everywhere we go. Yet, we all know that it is still better at least to be going in the right direction, rather than the wrong way.

We have entitled this lesson “The Right Direction,” and in it we are going to explore Genesis 6:9–11:9 where we will discover the direction God established for his people to follow after the great flood in the days of Noah. As we will see, in these chapters of the primeval history, Moses gave the people of Israel a clear direction to pursue. It may not have been all that they wanted, but it was ordained by God to bring them toward great blessings. And this portion of the primeval history is very important for Christians too, because we should be following this same direction as well.

Our study of Genesis 6:9–11:9 will divide into three parts: first, we will examine the literary structure of these chapters; second, we will explore their original meaning by discerning why Moses wrote this material for Israel; and third, we will look to the New Testament for guidance in applying these chapters to our lives. Let’s begin our study of the right direction by exploring the literary structure of these chapters.

#### **LITERARY STRUCTURE**

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Genesis 6:9–11:9 is a large portion of the primeval history, and it may be outlined in a number of different ways. For our purposes, we have segmented these chapters into two main parts. The first section includes 6:9–9:17, and we have entitled it “The Flood of Deliverance.” In this part of Genesis, Moses described the flood of Noah’s day. The second part of this material is Genesis 9:18–11:9, which we have entitled “The New Order.” It describes several crucial events that took place after the flood, and which set enduring patterns that characterized the world after the flood. To gain a better understanding of the literary pattern of these chapters, we will look into both of these

major parts. Let's begin by examining the structure of the story Moses wrote about the flood of Noah's day.

## **FLOOD OF DELIVERANCE**

In recent years a number of interpreters have noticed that the story of Noah's flood displays a relatively clear literary pattern. Although it is possible to describe this pattern in a number of ways, in this study we will point out how these chapters form a symmetrical five-step drama.

### **Initial Covenant**

The first step of this narrative appears in Genesis 6:9-22, and we will call it the "initial divine covenant" with Noah. In this portion of the narrative, Moses noted that Noah was a righteous man in a world that had gone sour. God spoke to Noah and revealed why he planned to destroy the human race. We read these words in Genesis 6:13:

**So God said to Noah, "I am going to put an end to all people, for the earth is filled with violence because of them. I am surely going to destroy both them and the earth" (Genesis 6:13).**

Yet, the first step of this narrative also tells us that God planned to start over again by delivering one man and his family, namely, righteous Noah. To assure Noah of his intention, God entered into an initial covenant with Noah. In Genesis 6:17-18, we read that God said these words to Noah:

**Everything on earth will perish. But I will establish my covenant with you, and you will enter the ark — you and your sons and your wife and your sons' wives with you (Genesis 6:17-18).**

At the beginning of the flood narrative, God swore a covenant oath to rescue Noah and his family from the coming flood. This covenant secured Noah's deliverance, and established him as the head of a new humanity after the flood.

Now that we have seen how the flood story opens by focusing on God's initial covenant with Noah, we should turn to the last portion of the story which balances the first, 8:20–9:17, which we have entitled the "enduring divine covenant" with Noah.

### **Enduring Covenant**

As our title suggests, in this passage God returned to Noah after the flood and made another covenant with him. God decided to give humanity the opportunity of a new order in the world. As we read in Genesis 8:22:

**As long as the earth endures, seedtime and harvest, cold and heat, summer and winter, day and night will never cease (Genesis 8:22).**

To establish the certainty of this new course, God entered into a second covenant with Noah at the end of the flood narrative in Genesis 9:11-15.

**I establish my covenant with you: Never again will all life be cut off by the waters of a flood; never again will there be a flood to destroy the earth... I have set my rainbow in the clouds, and it will be the sign of the covenant between me and the earth. Whenever I bring clouds over the earth and the rainbow appears in the clouds, I will remember my covenant between me and you and all living creatures of every kind (Genesis 9:11-15).**

So we see that the story of Noah's flood ends with the covenant promise that a flood will never again destroy the earth, and with God setting his bow in the clouds as a sure sign that he would never forget this promise. This closing covenant promise points to the great importance that Noah had in the primeval history. He was the mediator of a covenant, a covenant which extended to all future generations.

With the opening and closing sections of this story in mind, we are in a position to explore the inner workings of the flood narrative. The middle portion moves from God's initial covenant to the new order of the final covenant in three main steps.

### **Escape from Water**

The second step of this narrative appears in 7:1-16, which we have entitled Noah's "escape from water." This material is rather straightforward. Noah prepared the ark and brought animals of every kind into it, and floodwaters began to burst into the world, but Noah, his family, and the animals he had gathered were safely sealed in the ark.

### **Exit to Dry Land**

The fourth section of the story of Noah's flood forms a dramatic counterpoint to the second step. It describes Noah's exit to dry land in Genesis 8:6-19. After the flood had begun to subside, Noah longed for dry land to appear so that he could leave the ark. After a period of waiting, dry lands appeared and God commanded Noah to leave the ark, just as he had previously ordered him to enter it.

### **Divine Remembrance**

Now we are in a position to look at the center, or turning point, of this narrative, Genesis 7:17-8:5, which we have entitled the "divine remembrance" of Noah. These

verses begin with a description of the flood raging and destroying every living thing on earth. But by the end of this section, the flood has begun to subside.

Now, at the very heart of this section is a simple but profound sentence which indicates why God began to calm the raging flood. In Genesis 8:1 Moses wrote that in the midst of the storm:

**God remembered Noah and all the wild animals and the livestock that were with him in the ark, and he sent a wind over the earth, and the waters receded (Genesis 8:1).**

In great mercy, God did not forget the covenant he made with Noah and those with him. He remembered the passengers of the ark, and moved on their behalf against the raging flood.

This outline of Noah's flood brings to light the primary concerns of the story. Moses wrote about the flood as a story of deliverance. Although judgment came on the wicked of the earth, Moses' chief concern was to show that through Noah God brought humanity into a world of tremendous blessings.

Now that we have explored the first portion of Genesis 6:9–11:9, we should turn to the second major section, the new order, in Genesis 9:18–11:9.

## **NEW ORDER**

Moses' account of the new order in chapters 9–11 divides into two basic units. On the one hand, Genesis 9:18–10:32 focuses on the sons of Noah. On the other hand, Genesis 11:1–9 concern the defeat of the city of Babel. Although these passages may seem unrelated at first, we will see that they actually work together to create a pattern for the new order of the world. They set forth the central features of world history from that time forward. Let's look first at the account of the sons of Noah and the contribution it makes to this portrait of the newly ordered world.

### **Sons of Noah**

Moses' record of the sons of Noah in chapters 9–10 of Genesis consists of a title and two main sections. In 9:18–19 we find a title which indicates that this portion of Genesis focuses primarily on Noah's three sons, and how they were distributed over the earth.

In line with this title, Moses' record of Noah's sons divides into two main sections. In the first place, the story in 9:20–29 sets forth distinctions among the sons. And in the second place, 10:1–32 describes the distribution of Noah's sons and their descendants. It will be helpful to look at these sections separately.

Chapter 9:20–29 is that well-known passage in Genesis that speaks of the curse on Ham's son Canaan. Listen to what Moses wrote in Genesis 9:24–27:

**When Noah awoke from his wine and found out what his youngest son had done to him, he said, “Cursed be Canaan!” ... He also said, “Blessed be the Lord, the God of Shem! ... May God extend the territory of Japheth” (Genesis 9:24-27).**

Put simply, this narrative reports the events that led to a major distinction among the descendants of Noah. Noah cursed Canaan, the son of Ham. Canaan would be the lowest of slaves to his brothers. Yet, Noah pronounced blessings on his other sons Shem and Japheth, because they had treated him with respect.

Moses included this story in his description of the new order after the flood because the entire human race came from the three sons of Noah. The distinctions made here led to the dynamics of human relationships seen from this time forward in biblical history.

This outlook on the distinctions among Noah’s sons is confirmed by chapter 10: the distribution of Noah’s sons. Looking to the generations which came long after the days of Noah, in Genesis 10, Moses gave a sample listing of the places where the descendants of Ham, Shem, and Japheth went throughout the world. According to Genesis 10, the Japhethites occupied territories to the north, northeast, and northwest of Canaan. With a few exceptions, the Hamites moved toward Northern Africa, and the special son of Ham, namely Canaan, dwelled in the land of Canaan, Israel’s Promised Land. The Shemites or Semitic people largely occupied the territories of the Arabian Peninsula.

The record of Genesis 10 is highly selective and designed to provide only general patterns of migration. But these general patterns were enough for Moses to illustrate some long-term patterns that characterized human interaction in the new order after the flood.

Now that we have seen the literary structure of Moses’ attention to Noah’s sons in Genesis 9–10, we are in a position to look at the second portion of the new order after the flood: the defeat of the city of Babel in 11:1-9.

## **Defeat of Babel**

The story of the tower of Babel divides into five symmetrical dramatic steps. The first step of verses 1 and 2 begins with the vast majority of humanity together. But by contrast, this narrative ends in verses 8 and 9 where we learn that God dispersed humanity over the earth as he confused human language. Just how did humanity move from being together with one language to being scattered and having many languages? The middle portion explains what happened.

The second step of verses 3 and 4 reports a plan which the people had. They intended to build a city with a great tower reaching to heaven so that they would be famous for all time and utterly invincible. Nevertheless, the fourth step of this narrative in verses 6 and 7 balances this human plan by reporting God’s counter-plan. God called his heavenly army to attack the city by confusing the language of the people and thereby to stop the construction of the city and its tower.

The turning point of this story appears in verse 5, where God investigated the city and its tower. Once God saw the city and the proud plans of its inhabitants, he determined to bring an end to the city of Babel.

So we see that according to Moses, life after the flood was far from the paradise we might have expected. On the contrary, the account of Noah's sons shows that the new order includes complex interactions among different groups of human beings. It also includes more defiance of God, as well as God's eventual defeat of those who defy him. Although these structures of the new order may seem strange to our modern ears, we will see that they spoke rather plainly to the experiences of the Israelites to whom Moses first wrote these chapters.

Now that we have seen the literary structure of Genesis 6:9–11:9, we are in a position to ask a second question: Why did Moses write this account of the flood and the resulting new order? What lessons was he teaching the Israelites as they followed him toward the Promised Land?

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## ORIGINAL MEANING

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Needless to say, we can be sure that Moses wrote about Noah's flood and the course of the new order to inform Israel of the facts of this period of primeval history. Yet, his record is far too selective and oriented toward particular themes to think that this was all he had in mind. Moses wrote not just to report the past, but to guide Israel in his own day as well.

We will unfold Moses' purpose by looking at three portions of Genesis 6:9–11:9: first, we will examine the original meaning of the flood narrative; and then we will turn to Moses' record of Noah's sons; and finally, we will give attention to the original implications of the last portion of the primeval history — the defeat of Babel. Let's look first at the ways Moses related the flood of Noah to the experience of Israel in his day.

## FLOOD OF DELIVERANCE

To discern Moses' use of the flood narrative, we will look at two aspects of the story: first, the connections he established between the flood and the exodus; and second, the implications of these connections for Israel. Moses established connections between the flood and his own day by portraying Noah in ways that closely resembled his own life and ministry. Now, to be sure, the lives of Noah and Moses were different in many ways, and these differences should not be ignored. Yet, it is also evident that Moses purposefully depicted Noah so that his Israelite readers would see Noah as a precursor or foreshadowing of Moses.



## Connections

There are at least eight significant connections between Noah and Moses. In the first place, Moses drew a connection between himself and Noah in the motif of violence. You will recall from Genesis 6:13 that Noah's flood came because the world was filled with violence. As Exodus 1–2 make clear, the Egyptians had inflicted much violence on the people of Israel prior to the call of Moses. Moses' deliverance from Egypt came in response to the violence inflicted on the people of Israel. So, the work both of Noah and of Moses was to deliver from violence.

A second association appears in Moses' use of the term "ark." The Hebrew word for Noah's ark throughout Genesis 6–9 is *tevah* (תֵּבָה). Interestingly enough, the only other place where Moses used the term *tevah* was in Exodus 2:3,5. There he referred to the basket in which his mother placed him as an ark, or *tevah*. Although Noah's ark was mammoth while Moses' ark was very small, Moses pointed to the fact that both he and Noah had been delivered from watery deaths by means of an ark, or *tevah*.

In the third place, the importance of divine covenants also establishes Noah as a precursor of Moses. As we have seen, according to Genesis 6:18 and 9:11–17, Noah entered into covenant with God on behalf of the entire human race. But of course, we know that one of Moses' primary services to Israel was to mediate a divine covenant. As Exodus 19–24 illustrate so well, Moses was chosen to lead the people of Israel into a special covenant with Yahweh as they came to Mount Sinai.

The central role of judgment through water also establishes a fourth connection between the two men. In Genesis 6–9, God delivered Noah and his family by taking them safely through a flood that destroyed the wicked of the earth. And in much the same way, as Exodus 13–15 tell us, Moses brought Israel out of Egypt by passing through the waters of the Red Sea, which waters in turn destroyed the army of the Egyptian oppressors.

In the fifth place, God sent wind to drive back the waters in both the days of Noah and the days of Moses. As we have read, according to Genesis 8:1, God sent a wind to drive back the waters of Noah's flood. Similarly, according to Exodus 14:21, at the Red Sea, "the Lord drove back the sea with a strong east wind."

A sixth connection appears in the emphasis put on animals. As Genesis 6:19 tells us, God commanded Noah to bring animals into the ark. On no less than four occasions, the book of Exodus mentions the many animals that left Egypt with the Israelites. Just as God ordained for Noah to bring animals into the world of his day, God also ordained that Moses should bring animals into the Promised Land.

Seventh, the theme of divine remembrance also joins Noah and Moses. You will recall that in Genesis 8:1, as the waters raged in the days of Noah, God acted on Noah's behalf because he remembered him. God had made a covenant with Noah that he would bring him safely through the flood, and he remembered that covenant. In much the same way, God declared to Moses that he delivered Israel from Egypt because he remembered his covenant. Listen to what God told Moses in Exodus 6:5:

**Moreover, I have heard the groaning of the Israelites, whom the Egyptians are enslaving, and I have remembered my covenant (Exodus 6:5).**



Divine remembrance played a vital role in the flood and in the exodus.

Finally, the blessing of nature also associates Noah with Moses. Noah brought the human race into a new world where God promised there would be a lasting and stable natural order that would benefit humanity. In a similar fashion, Moses told Israel that in the Land of Promise, nature would remain constant and beneficial in much the same way.

With these connections between Noah and Moses in mind, we are in a position to see the implications of these parallels for the nation of Israel. Why did Moses establish these connections?

## Implications

To grasp the original implications of this material, we must remember that the people of Israel had seriously rebelled against Moses, questioning his authority and the wisdom of his program of exodus and conquest. These challenges to his ministry led Moses to establish connections between himself and Noah.

God had used Noah in the flood of deliverance to redeem humanity from horrible primeval violence and to re-establish the human race in a new world of great blessings. And in much the same way, God had chosen Moses to deliver Israel from the horrible violence of Egypt and to bring Israel into a new world of the Promised Land. Moses' design for Israel was so similar to the flood of Noah that no one could rightly deny it had come from the hand of God.

Now that we have seen the original meaning of the flood of deliverance, we should turn to Moses' record of the sons of Noah in Genesis 9:18–10:32.

## NOAH'S SONS

Why did Moses include this material in his primeval history? What was his purpose in bringing these matters to Israel's attention? To examine this portion of Moses' record, we will look at three issues: first, his special focus on Canaan; second, the theme of conflict; and third, the implications of these motifs for Israel. Consider first the way that Moses gave attention to Canaan.

## Canaan

You will recall that Noah awoke from his drunken sleep and realized that Ham had dishonored him, and that Shem and Japheth had honored him. Now it would seem only reasonable for Noah to have been angry with Ham and to have cursed him, just as he blessed his other sons. But this is not what happened. Listen to the entirety of what Noah said in Genesis 9:25-27:

**“Cursed be Canaan! The lowest of slaves will he be to his brothers.”  
He also said, “Blessed be the Lord, the God of Shem! May Canaan be  
the slave of Shem. May God extend the territory of Japheth; may**

**Japheth live in the tents of Shem, and may Canaan be his slave”  
(Genesis 9:25-27).**

As we see in this passage, Shem and Japheth received appropriate rewards for their righteousness, but Ham was not even mentioned here. Instead, it was Canaan, the son of Ham, who received Noah’s curse.

When we look carefully at this story, we see that Ham serves a different role than his brothers. In short, Ham has little significance apart from the fact that he was the father of Canaan. Notice the way Moses wrote of Ham in this narrative. In 9:18 we read:

**The sons of Noah who came out of the ark were Shem, Ham and Japheth. (Ham was the father of Canaan) (Genesis 9:18).**

The same identification appears in 9:22 as well:

**Ham, the father of Canaan, saw his father's nakedness (Genesis 9:22).**

In many respects, Ham fades into the background of this story and his son Canaan takes his place alongside Shem and Japheth.

With Moses’ special emphasis on Canaan in mind, we may turn to a second concern that appears in his treatment of the sons of Noah — conflict in the new order after the flood.

## **Conflict**

The theme of conflict plays a major role in Moses’ attention to Noah’s sons. To miss this theme is to miss the most important aspect of the story. The idea of conflict also appears in Genesis 9:25-27:

**“Cursed be Canaan! The lowest of slaves will he be to his brothers.”  
He also said, “Blessed be the Lord, the God of Shem! May Canaan be the slave of Shem. May God extend the territory of Japheth; may Japheth live in the tents of Shem, and may Canaan be his slave”  
(Genesis 9:25-27).**

Notice how Moses stressed the certainty of conflict by repeating Canaan’s curse three times in this passage. In verse 25, he pronounced the curse that Canaan would be the “lowest of slaves,” or the lowest kind of slave imaginable. In verse 26, Noah predicted that Canaan would be the slave of Shem. And in verse 27, Moses added that Canaan would become Japheth’s slave as well. Through this repetition, Moses stressed the fact that Canaan would certainly be conquered by his brothers.

Beyond this, it’s important to note that these verses portray Shem as the principal victor over Canaan. In verse 27, the words “may Japheth live in the tents of Shem, and may Canaan be his slave,” may be better translated, “may Japheth live in the tents of Shem so that Canaan may be his slave.” Noah’s idea seems to be that Canaan will

become subservient to Japheth only to the extent that Japheth joined forces with Shem. In effect, Moses believed that Shem was to take the lead in subjugating Canaan.

So we see in this passage that Moses established an important feature of the new order after the flood, which could hardly have been expected. He understood that the future of humanity would entail a dramatic conflict in which the descendants of Shem would subjugate the descendants of Canaan.

In light of Moses' attention to Canaan and the theme of conflict, we are able to see the original implications of Noah's sons for ancient Israel.

## Implications

Why did Moses include these events in his record of the new order after the flood? Well, Moses had a very specific reason for describing the new order in this way. The conflict between Shem and Canaan spoke directly to the needs of his Israelite audience. It addressed a crucial dimension of their lives.

The key to understanding Moses' purpose appears in Genesis 10:18-19. After listing some of the descendants of Canaan, Moses wrote that:

**Later the Canaanite clans scattered and the borders of Canaan reached from Sidon toward Gerar as far as Gaza, and then toward Sodom, Gomorrah, Admah and Zeboiim, as far as Lasha (Genesis 10:18-19).**

These rather specific geographical references were familiar to Moses' Israelite readers. The descendants of Canaan, or the Canaanites, had settled in the region that stretched north to south from Sidon to Gaza, and to the region of Sodom and Gomorrah. Moses was especially concerned with those descendants of Canaan who had settled in the Promised Land. As the Shemite nation specially called by God, the people of Israel were to move into this land of the Canaanites and to claim it as their own.

So we see that Moses' account of the sons of Noah was not simply designed to give an account of the past. It was designed to give a background to Moses' call to Israel to move forward into the conquest, just as God had ordained in the primeval history. As a result, the Israelites who resisted Moses' call to take the land of Canaan were not simply resisting Moses. They were actually resisting the plan of God, the order that God had established for the world after the flood.

Now that we have seen how the accounts of the flood and of Noah's sons apply to the original Israelite readers, we should turn to our third focus: Moses' original intention when writing about the defeat of Babel in Genesis 11:1-9.

## DEFEAT OF BABEL

To grasp how Moses wanted the Israelites to apply the story of Babel's defeat to their lives, we will look into three aspects this passage: first, Moses' description of the

city; second, his description of Yahweh's victory; and third, the implications for the Israelites as they moved toward the Promised Land. Let's look first at the description of the city.

## City

We should note that the name of the city, Babel, corresponds to the city which later came to be known as Babylon. By the time of Moses, the city of Babylon was well known in the Ancient Near East. It had been a center of civilization for many years, and its reputation had reached mythic proportions. So when Moses wrote about a place called Babel after the flood, his Israelite readers would have immediately recognized this place as the primeval origin of a great urban center.

## Victory

A second important aspect of Genesis 11:1-9 is the way in which Moses described Yahweh's victory over this great primeval city. At several points in this story, Moses displayed the grandeur of God's victory by contrasting the outlooks of the inhabitants of Babel with his own true outlook. For example, consider the way Moses handled the theme of scattering, or in Hebrew, the verb *puts* (פָּצַח). On the one hand, the inhabitants of Babel were deeply concerned with the possibility that they might be scattered. In 11:4 we find that they built the city so that they may "not be scattered over the face of the whole earth."

But by contrast, Moses reported twice that God did precisely what the people of Babel did not want to happen. In 11:8 we read that:

**The Lord scattered them ... over all the earth (Genesis 11:8).**

And again in 11:9 we find that:

**From there the Lord scattered them over the face of the whole earth (Genesis 11:9).**

Frequently in the Old Testament, the term "scatter" has the very negative connotation of utter defeat in battle. Defeated soldiers are scattered as their enemies chase them away, slaughtering them as they flee. And this is the connotation in this story as well. Moses presented this story as an account of an astonishing victory for Yahweh. Yahweh called his heavenly host to war against the city of Babel, and to chase away its fleeing inhabitants across the face of the earth.

Another way in which Moses contrasted his outlook with that of the inhabitants of Babel was with respect to the size of the city and its tower. According to Genesis 11:4, the inhabitants of Babel wanted a tower that reached to the heavens, the place of their gods. But Moses scoffed at this idea. Instead, in Genesis 11:5 he wrote that:

**The Lord came down to see the city and the tower that the men were building (Genesis 11:5).**

The Hebrew word *yarad* (יָרַד), which is here translated “came down,” has a rather specific connotation in this story. God did not simply notice the city; he did not even simply come to the city. Instead, whereas the inhabitants of Babel wanted to build a tower that reached to the heavens, Moses insisted that Yahweh had to come down from the heights of heaven just to see the city. So we see that Moses jeered at the pretense of the inhabitants of Babel. From Yahweh’s point of view, this city was little more than a tiny speck.

Finally, we should note how the defeat of Babel led Moses to deride the reputation of this primeval city. The inhabitants of the city called it Babel. In the languages of Mesopotamia, the term *babel* meant “the gate of god.” This name expressed the belief that their ziggurat actually formed a gateway to the gods, and that they were secured by the powers of heaven.

But Moses had a different viewpoint on the name of the city. Since Yahweh had severely defeated Babel, the city was clearly not the gate of God. So, what then did the name mean? Moses’ strikingly sarcastic answer appears in Genesis 11:9:

**That is why it was called Babel — because there the Lord confused the language of the whole world (Genesis 11:9).**

To understand Moses’ sarcasm in this verse, we need to understand how he played with the sounds of two Hebrew words. First he said, “That is why it was called Babel.” The Hebrew word for “Babel” is simply *babel* (בָּבֶל), a Hebrew version of what the Mesopotamians called that place. But then Moses explained that the city had this name because the Lord confused human language there. The Hebrew word translated “confused” is *balal* (בָּלַל), which sounds similar enough to *babel* in Hebrew that Moses’ sarcasm worked. He reviled the ancient city by saying that the real reason it was called Babel was because of *balal* or confusion took place there. So, from Moses’ point of view, the name “Babel” was appropriate for this place, not because it was the gate of God, but because it was a place of confusion, confusion for the whole world. Through this sarcasm, Moses utterly reversed the awesome reputation that Babel had in his day. He led the Israelites in delightful laughter as he told them that the victory of their God Yahweh had made a joke out of the greatest city of primeval history.

With the description of the city and Yahweh’s victory in mind, we are in a position to see the implications of this story for the people of Israel as they moved toward the Promised Land.

## Implications

As we know, at Kadesh Barnea, Moses sent spies into the land of Canaan who returned with bad reports. They claimed that Israel could not conquer the land of Canaan

because the forces there were too great. As a result, the Israelites turned away from the conquest and spent the next forty years wandering in the wilderness. It was only when the next generation came to adulthood that Moses was ready to move Israel against Canaan once again.

One aspect of these bad reports helps us understand the significance of the defeat of primeval Babel. Listen to what the spies said about the cities of Canaan as reported in Deuteronomy 1:28:

**The people are stronger and taller than we are; the cities are large, with walls up to the sky (Deuteronomy 1:28).**

Unfortunately, most modern translations of this verse fail to draw the connection between this description of the Canaanite cities and the tower of Babel. When the spies spoke of “walls up to the sky,” the term for “sky” is the Hebrew word *shamayim* (שָׁמַיִם), which is often translated “heaven.” In fact, it is the same term used about the tower of Babel when it is described as “a tower that reaches to the heavens” in Genesis 11:4. In both cases, the idea was that the cities were invincible because they reached to the heights of heaven.

So it is that Moses drew a connection between the primeval city of Babel and the cities of Canaan. The Israelites thought that the walls surrounding the cities of Canaan reached to heaven, much like those who built the tower at Babel thought that their ziggurat had reached heaven. This connection between the city of Babel and the cities of Canaan brings Moses’ purpose to light. Put simply, the Canaanite cities before the people of Israel may have seemed to reach to heaven, but they were still no match for the power of Yahweh. In the primeval days, Yahweh moved against the greatest city known to humanity, whose tower supposedly reached to heaven as well. Yet, this primeval city, which was greater than any city of Canaan, was easily destroyed by Yahweh.

Just as God had delivered the human race into a new order through the primeval flood, he had delivered Israel from Egypt. And just as God had ordained conflict between Shem and Canaan, Moses was leading Israel toward the land of the Canaanites. And just as God defeated the great city of Babel, he would soon give victory to Israel against the cities of Canaan. From these chapters of the primeval history, the people of Israel should have understood that to follow Moses toward the Promised Land was to move in the right direction.

So far, we have seen the literary structure and original meaning of Moses’ record of Genesis 6:9–11:9. Now we are ready to ask a third question: what are some of the ways we should apply this material to our lives today?

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## MODERN APPLICATION

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In our usual fashion, we will approach the question of modern application by following the New Testament’s description of the three stages of Christ’s kingdom. We will look first at how the flood of deliverance and the resulting new order apply to the inauguration of the kingdom in the first coming of Christ. Then we will turn to the

relevance of these matters for the continuation of the kingdom throughout the history of the church. And finally, we will examine how the New Testament applies this portion of the primeval history to the consummation of the kingdom when Christ returns in glory.

As we approach the final chapters of Moses' primeval history in this way, we will discover that the New Testament extends Moses' original purpose for Israel into the three stages of Christ's kingdom, his work in the past, in the present and in the future. Let's look first at the ways in which the New Testament views these themes in light of the first coming of Christ.

## INAUGURATION

In the inauguration of the kingdom, Christ accomplished a great salvation on the behalf of his people in ways that corresponded to the themes Moses emphasized in Genesis 6:9–11:9. We can see these connections in at least two ways: the covenant which Christ mediated, and the victory he accomplished.

### Covenant

On the one hand, Christ brought deliverance to his people by means of a covenant that rescued them from the judgment of God. As we have seen, Noah played a special role as the mediator of a covenant, and Moses drew upon this fact as he explained his own ministry to Israel. In a similar fashion, the New Testament teaches that Christ is our deliverer because he mediated a new covenant when he came to this earth.

All too often, Christians fail to realize that Christ came to this earth when God's people were under divine judgment. Because Israel so flagrantly violated the covenants of the Old Testament, in 586 B.C. the Babylonians destroyed Jerusalem and the people of Israel never fully recovered from foreign domination. But the prophet Jeremiah predicted that God would redeem a people out of the fire of exile by establishing a new covenant in the future. In Jeremiah 31:31 the prophet announced:

**“The time is coming,” declares the Lord, “when I will make a new covenant with the house of Israel and with the house of Judah” (Jeremiah 31:31).**

As most Christians know, the New Testament teaches that Jesus came to this earth as the mediator of this new covenant. Jesus himself acknowledged this role for himself when he spoke to his disciples at the Last Supper. As we read in Luke 22:20, he told them:

**This cup is the new covenant in my blood, which is poured out for you (Luke 22:20).**



So we see that just as Noah delivered from judgment as the mediator of a divine covenant, in the inauguration of the kingdom Jesus delivered those who trusted him from judgment by mediating the new covenant through his blood, which he shed on the cross.

## Victory

In addition to bringing a new covenant, Jesus' earthly ministry fulfilled the theme of victory in holy war. Moses' focused on the theme of holy war as a part of the new order after the flood. He established that the new order of the world required Israel to move forward into the conquest of Canaan, and he assured them of a great victory. In comparison, listen to the way Paul described Christ's victory at the inauguration of the kingdom in Colossians 2:15:

**And having disarmed the powers and authorities, he made a public spectacle of them, triumphing over them by the cross (Colossians 2:15).**

As we see here, Jesus' victory in his first coming was not political, but spiritual. Jesus' death and resurrection initiated the defeat of the evil powers and spiritual authorities that ruled over the world in his day. His work of redemption made a public spectacle of them much like Yahweh had made a spectacle of the primeval city of Babel, and later had destroyed the great cities of Canaan.

In this sense, Jesus not only delivered through his new covenant, but he was also victorious over the spiritual forces of darkness in his death and resurrection. Followers of Christ look to Christ's earthly ministry as the beginning of the final victory promised long ago in the book of Genesis.

As we should expect, the New Testament does not simply relate the themes of Genesis 6:9–11:9 to the first coming of Christ. They also apply to the continuation of the kingdom, the time in which we now live.

## CONTINUATION

The New Testament describes the time between the first and second comings of Christ in at least two ways that relate to the last chapters of Moses' primeval history. These perspectives relate directly to the importance of baptism and spiritual warfare in the Christian life. As we live the Christian life in this age, we come into contact with the significance of Noah's flood and the new order established after that flood.

## Baptism

One New Testament passage in particular describes baptism in connection with the flood of deliverance in Noah's day. Listen to what the apostle Peter wrote in 1 Peter 3:20-22:



**God waited patiently in the days of Noah while the ark was being built. In it only a few people, eight in all, were saved through water, and this water symbolizes baptism that now saves you also — not the removal of dirt from the body but the pledge of a good conscience toward God. It saves you by the resurrection of Jesus Christ, who has gone into heaven and is at God's right hand — with angels, authorities and powers in submission to him (1 Peter 3:20-22).**

In this remarkable passage, Peter directly connected every person's experience of salvation during the continuation of the kingdom to the flood of Noah's day. He began by noting that Noah and his family were saved through water. Their deliverance through water opened the way for humanity to enter a renewed world of blessing.

But also notice that Peter drew a direct relationship between the water of Noah's flood and the Christian life by focusing on baptism. He said that the water in Noah's day symbolized, or anticipated the water of Christian baptism. As we have seen in this lesson, the water of Noah's day cleansed the world of horrible corruption and opened the way for a new beginning, much like Moses' passing through the Red Sea removed the tyranny of Egypt and brought a new beginning for the nation of Israel. Well, in a similar way, the water of baptism cleanses believers of their sins and grants them a new beginning of everlasting life in Christ.

Now we must note carefully that 1 Peter 3:21 states that baptism saves only in the sense that it is the pledge of a good conscience toward God. In other words, mere washing with water during baptism does not save anyone. Instead, it is only as baptism is the pledge of a heart forgiven and cleansed from sin by faith in Christ that it symbolizes salvation. So it is that the New Testament applies the flood of deliverance in Noah's day to the continuation of the kingdom by asserting that every time an individual comes to Christ in saving faith, he or she is taken through the cleansing water of baptism and into a new life, much like Noah was brought through the flood into a new world.

## **Spiritual Warfare**

As we have seen, however, Moses' primeval history indicated that the water of Noah's day delivered humanity into a holy war. Moses originally drew attention to this fact to encourage Israel to conform to this new order by moving into the conquest of Canaan. In a similar fashion, the New Testament applies this teaching to the continuation of the kingdom as it describes the spiritual warfare every believer faces. Listen to the way Paul put the matter in Ephesians 6:11-12:

**Put on the full armor of God so that you can take your stand against the devil's schemes. For our struggle is not against flesh and blood, but against the rulers, against the authorities, against the powers of this dark world and against the spiritual forces of evil in the heavenly realms (Ephesians 6:11-12).**

This and other New Testament passages plainly teach that Christians today are at war with evil. Unfortunately, many Christians today fail to embrace this dimension of their spiritual lives, much like the Israelites following Moses tried to avoid the conquest of Canaan. But the New Testament's perspective is clear. We must join in this spiritual battle. As Paul put it in Ephesians 6:13:

**Therefore put on the full armor of God, so that when the day of evil comes, you may be able to stand your ground, and after you have done everything, to stand (Ephesians 6:13).**

If we don the armor of God, we will be victorious in our spiritual warfare.

So we see that just as the New Testament connects Noah's deliverance through the flood to our deliverance through baptism, it also teaches that just as the primeval world was delivered to warfare, Christian baptism delivers us to engage in spiritual warfare every day of our lives.

## CONSUMMATION

In light of the way the New Testament applies the last chapters of the primeval history to the inauguration and continuation of the kingdom, it is not surprising to discover that the consummation of the kingdom is also described in terms of Noah's flood and the warfare of the new primeval order.

## Final Cataclysm

New Testament writers made these connections by describing the return of Christ in glory as the final cataclysm and the final battle. In 2 Peter 3 we find an explicit association of Noah's primeval flood with the return of Christ in glory. Listen to the way Peter began his discussion in verses 3-6.

**You must understand that in the last days scoffers will come, scoffing and following their own evil desires. They will say, "Where is this 'coming' he promised? Ever since our fathers died, everything goes on as it has since the beginning of creation." But they deliberately forget that long ago by God's word the heavens existed and the earth was formed out of water and by water. By these waters also the world of that time was deluged and destroyed (2 Peter 3:3-6).**

In this passage Peter corrected scoffers who pointed to the uniformity of the order of nature as proof that Jesus would not return. They believed that from the time of creation, everything had remained uniform. Nothing had ever disrupted the world from the way God had made it in the beginning. And since nothing had ever changed, they believed that nothing ever would.

But Peter appealed to Moses' record of Noah's flood to prove otherwise. God created the world in the beginning out of water, but during the days of Noah, the world was destroyed by a flood. A major cataclysm had occurred in the history of the world. God had intervened and destroyed the world in the days of Noah. But listen to Peter's conclusion in 2 Peter 3:7:

**By the same word the present heavens and earth are reserved for fire, being kept for the day of judgment and destruction of ungodly men (2 Peter 3:7).**

Put simply, Peter argued that just as the primeval world had come to an end through the flood, the present heavens and earth would come to an end at the return of Christ in judgment. To be sure, this time, judgment will come by fire and not by water, but we can be sure that when God decides to act against sin in the world for the final time, it will be through a great cosmic destruction, much as it was in the primeval flood.

In this way, the New Testament teaches us to view the return of Christ in terms of Noah's flood. In the days of Noah, the wicked were judged and removed from the earth by a great cosmic upheaval. In an even greater way, when Christ returns in glory, there will be a cataclysm that utterly disrupts the world as we know it. The wicked will be removed from the earth, and all who follow Christ will be delivered into a grand and eternal new heavens and earth.

## **Final Battle**

As we have seen, however, in the primeval history Noah's flood was accompanied by conflict and war between the people of God and the enemies of God. In line with this association, the New Testament also describes Christ's return as a final cosmic battle. Listen to the way the apostle John wrote about the return of Christ in Revelation 19:11-16:

**I saw heaven standing open and there before me was a white horse, whose rider is called Faithful and True. With justice he judges and makes war. His eyes are like blazing fire, and on his head are many crowns. He has a name written on him that no one knows but he himself. He is dressed in a robe dipped in blood, and his name is the Word of God. The armies of heaven were following him, riding on white horses and dressed in fine linen, white and clean. Out of his mouth comes a sharp sword with which to strike down the nations. "He will rule them with an iron scepter." He treads the winepress of the fury of the wrath of God Almighty. On his robe and on his thigh he has this name written: KING OF KINGS AND LORD OF LORDS (Revelation 19:11-16).**

In spectacular language of apocalyptic vision, John declared that the return of Christ would be a worldwide battle in which Christ himself would appear and destroy all of his

enemies. The glory of an eternal victory will come to those who have trusted Christ for salvation, but judgment and destruction will fall upon those who have rejected him.

So we see that the New Testament presents the consummation of the kingdom of Christ as the ultimate experience of God's victory over evil. God remains determined to establish his kingdom against all foes. When Christ returns in glory, this divine purpose will be fully realized. The wicked will be destroyed and the people of God in Christ will enjoy eternal victory and peace in the new heaven and new earth.

## CONCLUSION

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In this lesson we have looked at Genesis 6:9–11:9. In this portion of Scripture, Moses revealed the right direction for the people of Israel to follow as he led them toward the Promised Land. We have seen the literary structure of these chapters, and how Moses designed them to encourage Israel to move forward with confidence toward the conquest of Canaan. And we have also seen how the New Testament applies these themes to the three stages of Christ's kingdom.

As we face the struggles and challenges of living for Christ in this fallen world, we must take to heart the message which Moses gave the people of Israel long ago. In Christ, God has delivered us from the tyranny of sin, just as he delivered the primeval world through Noah. But he has also set us on a path that requires a period of conflict and struggle as we wait for the day when Christ brings ultimate victory to his people. Until that time, we know that the world in which we live is not yet perfect, but we can be sure that following Christ in his spiritual battle for the world is going in the right direction.

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