

Summary for Session 3: Early World—Part 2

Prep work: Read Genesis 4-11

DVD: Jeff begins by quoting St. John Paul II: “At the root of the Fall is a failure to grasp the nature of God's fatherhood.” Understanding God as Father is paramount to understanding the Story of Salvation, and Jeff cautions us about listening to anyone who tries to downplay that aspect. God as Father will often be set in contrast to other father figures of the Bible, as we shall see. As it was with Original Sin, a loss of trust in God and His nurturing nature are inherent in every sin. For the Bible authors, there are two types of people: those who follow God's way, and those who go their own way. When God's people are not obedient, this “own way” becomes exile. Adam and Eve were exiled from the Garden of Eden, various figures in the Bible will be exiled because of their actions, and the Israelites as a whole will end up in exile several times before Jesus enters history. To the Israelites, exile was Eastward, and to repent was to turn around—to be homeward bound.

The original fathers of these “two types” of people are Cain (who goes his own way) and Seth (who follows God). Cain, after being told by God to offer a better sacrifice, kills his brother, Abel, in rage and envy. While the authors do not specify what was wrong with Cain's offering, likely factors include an offering that was not of the best, as Abel's was, or an offering not given with sincerity. Farther down Cain's line of progeny, we find Lamech, who provides example of how far from God Cain's family has gone. He is violent and polygamous. In contrast, examination of Seth's line points to Enoch, who walked with the Lord and did not, apparently, suffer death, but was taken up to God, like Elijah. Also we come to Noah, another man who is righteous in the eyes of the Lord.

Jeff pauses to note that the use of tracing genealogies is often employed by Bible authors to focus the story; we should not necessarily get caught up in the specific persons, but see the big picture and allow our focus to settle where the authors stop the genealogy. Jeff also notes that in the Rabbinic tradition, the authors of Genesis feel free to leave out details that don't specifically move the focus of the story along. Adam and Eve almost certainly had more than three children, but for the purposes of Salvation History, only an examination of those three were considered necessary. Jeff brings up the aspect of citing how long each generation lived before the flood. This is perhaps not so much because we should be astonished they lived a long time, but rather that they eventually died and that longevity was shortened through the generations—a consequence of sin. Finally, Jeff offers a possible explanation for a seeming misplacement: the mention of the Nephilim in Genesis 6. In another case of a reoccurring theme of the Bible, the story of the Nephilim highlights what happens when believers marry non-believers. The “sons of God” might be taken to mean the line of Seth, who follow God's way, while the “daughters of man” might be those in the line of Cain. This interpretation would be used to explain the increasing sinfulness of humans, which will lead to the Flood.

The story of the Flood echoes the Creation story as a sort of “re-creation,” though with a family this time instead of a couple. The 40 days of rain (40 being a period of trial in Biblical language) and image of an ark weathering the waters prefigure the Church and baptism. When the waters recede once more and God makes a covenant with Noah, the sign of God's promise is a strong use of imagery. A “bow” (weapon) is “hung” (not to be used again). Acknowledging that man will still sin, the author notes that animals now have fear of man and the limitations on capital punishment are spelled out. Noah's three sons repopulate the earth, spreading in specific directions. It is Shem's line that the Bible story will follow, focusing next on Abram and the beginning of the patriarchs of the faith.

The final notes are on the story of the Tower of Babel. In another effort to go their own way, people try and “make a name for themselves,” which can be read as their efforts to become the named seed of Eve who will crush the serpent. Rather than follow God's way to heaven, they will build a tower to heaven on their own, which they can do because they can communicate and work together on the project. Once communication breaks down with the entrance of multiple languages, they are no longer able to work together. Our own experience informs us that in fact, we often work *against* each other when lines of communication break down. This people who choose to follow their own way will never “make a name for themselves.” It is God who uses those who say yes to God's Will, and the next section, Early Patriarchs, will examine those for whom God definitely “made a name.”