

Lecture 2: The Two Offspring, the Flood, and Babel

Introduction to Biblical Theology · Dr. Thomas Schreiner · The Master's Seminary · 31 minutes

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Before you watch

The first promise immediately becomes a war. Dr. Schreiner traces the two offspring of Genesis 3:15 through Cain and Abel, the darkening world of Genesis 6, the flood that re-creates the earth, the covenant that preserves it, and the tower at Babel. Listen for the one problem that survives every judgment, and why that matters for the promise.

The lecture, section by section

1. Victory through conflict

Genesis 3:15 promises victory, but victory through wounds: the serpent will strike the heel of the woman's offspring even as his head is crushed. The whole Bible hears this promise. Paul tells the Romans that the God of peace will soon crush Satan under their feet (Romans 16), and Galatians 3 names the ultimate offspring: the promises were spoken to Abraham and to his seed, who is Christ. Jesus himself is the fulfillment of the first promise.

2. Two offspring, two humanities

From Genesis 3:15 onward, every person belongs to one of two lines. All of us are born as offspring of the serpent; only new birth makes anyone offspring of the woman. Jesus speaks this same language: in the parable of the wheat and the tares the good seed are the children of the kingdom and the weeds are the children of the evil one (Matthew 13), and to his opponents he says, you are of your father the devil (John 8).

3. Cain and Abel: the battle of the seeds begins

Cain stands with the serpent, Abel with the woman, and the pattern that will run the length of Scripture appears at once: the serpent's offspring seek to destroy the woman's. It is why Herod hunts a newborn. Schreiner presses that the conflict has never stopped; it is going on everywhere still.

4. Why Abel's sacrifice was accepted

Genesis 4 hints that Abel brought the best, the firstborn and the fat portions, but Hebrews is the inspired commentary that names the reason: by faith Abel offered a better sacrifice than Cain. The problem was never that Cain brought grain; he was a farmer. Faith is the root and works are the fruit, and Hebrews becomes the lens through which Genesis 4 is rightly read. Cain's motive was jealousy, and the serpent's son put the woman's son to death.

5. Two lines, gathering sin

The story widens into two family lines, the children of the serpent and the children of God, and sin gathers force generation by generation like a growing avalanche.

6. The sons of God of Genesis 6

A famously disputed passage. Schreiner holds that the sons of God are fallen angels, the unanimous reading of Second Temple Judaism and, he argues, the background of Jude, 1 Peter 3, and 2 Peter 2. To the objection that angels cannot marry he answers that when angels come to earth in Scripture they come as men, even eating with Abraham in Genesis 18. He is quick to add that good men differ, his friend Wayne Grudem firmly among them, and that the question is not a crucial one.

7. Noah's world: eight against the earth

By Genesis 6 the serpent's offspring are not merely winning but trouncing. Noah is righteous and blameless, and nearly alone; 1 Peter 3 counts eight persons saved, a word written to a suffering church. We may feel out of step with our age, Schreiner notes, but we are not eight in all the world.

8. Why the story is this dark: the greatness of sin

The LORD saw that every inclination of the human heart was only evil continually. The story is told this way to teach us the enormity of sin, including the sin of my own heart, which is far greater than I know. This is why a Redeemer had to die, and why the world's easy shrug, surely God simply forgives the way any father does, reveals how small its view of sin is. Unlike the capricious gods of the myths, the true God's judgment is righteous, purposeful, and morally serious.

9. The flood as re-creation

The flood is narrated in creation's own vocabulary. The earth is covered with water as in Genesis 1, the waters are divided, dry land appears, the creatures swarm out to fill the earth, and God re-establishes seedtime and harvest, cold and heat, day and night (Genesis 8). God starts the world over.

10. The covenant with Noah

Humanity's commission is renewed: be fruitful and multiply, rule the creation placed under human authority, now with every moving thing given for food, and the image of God still stamped on man (Genesis 9). Peter Gentry argues that the Hebrew idiom here, establishing rather than cutting a covenant, signals the confirming of a covenant already made, so that Noah's covenant re-establishes the covenant with Adam; Schreiner finds the argument persuasive here. The covenant's purpose is preservation: the human race will endure in history until God's redemptive plan is fulfilled, and the rainbow is God's war bow hung up as the sign and seal of it. The ark itself, where God's presence rides with his people, may even whisper of the tabernacle.

11. The problem the flood could not wash away

The difference between Noah and Eden is that Noah is a sinner. Even after the flood the verdict stands: the inclination of the human heart is evil from youth (Genesis 8). And the narrator shows us Noah, like Adam, sinning in a garden. There is no return to paradise by starting over, because the flood cannot reach the heart.

12. Government to restrain evil

Into that raging evil God gives a restraint: whoever sheds man's blood, by man shall his blood be shed, for God made man in his image (Genesis 9). The lecture argues the grounding is transcultural, resting on the image of God rather than the Mosaic covenant, and hears its echo when Romans 13 says the governing authority does not bear the sword in vain. The text's own logic runs opposite to our instincts: it is because human life is so valuable that murder forfeits the murderer's life.

13. Babel: the fundamental sin

Scattered humanity gathers to build a tower, to make a name for themselves and reach God's realm without God. That, Schreiner says, is the fundamental sin in every age: the conviction that we can build a good world and a good life without him. Isaiah 14 puts the boast in the mouth of Babylon's king: I will ascend, I will set my throne on high, I will make myself like the Most High.

14. God always rules; evil never wins

At the flood and again at Babel, God judges and scatters, and the lesson holds: however total evil's victory appears, it never wins. When humanity concentrates itself apart from God, evil concentrates with it, as the twentieth century taught at terrible cost. But the righteous finally win, because God always rules.

Scripture in this lecture

Genesis 3, 4, 6, 8, 9, 11, 18; Isaiah 14; Matthew 13; John 8; Romans 13, 16; Galatians 3; Hebrews 11; 1 Peter 3; 2 Peter 2; Jude

Key terms

Offspring of the woman and of the serpent

The Bible's two humanities. Everyone is born on the serpent's side; only new birth moves anyone to the woman's.

Inspired commentary

Later Scripture explaining earlier Scripture, as Hebrews reveals that faith, not the offering itself, made Abel's sacrifice acceptable.

Establishing a covenant

The Hebrew idiom for confirming a covenant already made, the language Genesis uses when God renews Adam's covenant with Noah.

Re-creation

The flood told in creation's own vocabulary: waters covering the earth, waters divided, dry land, creatures swarming, be fruitful and multiply again.

The Noahic covenant

God's pledge that the human race will be preserved in history until his redemptive purposes are fulfilled, with the rainbow, his war bow hung up, as its sign.

The fundamental sin

Living as though we do not need God: Babel's tower, and the boast of Isaiah 14 to become like the Most High.

Comprehension check

Circle your answers, then check them against the key on the last page.

1. How does Genesis 3:15 say the victory over the serpent will come?
 - A. Instantly and painlessly
 - B. Through the giving of the law
 - C. Through conflict, with the offspring himself struck
 - D. Through Israel's armies
2. According to Galatians 3, who is the ultimate offspring of the woman?
 - A. Isaac
 - B. David
 - C. Israel as a nation
 - D. Christ
3. How does anyone become offspring of the woman rather than the serpent?
 - A. By new birth
 - B. By ancestry
 - C. By keeping the law
 - D. By baptism
4. In the parable of the wheat and the tares, the weeds are what?
 - A. False teachers only
 - B. The children of the evil one
 - C. Unfruitful believers
 - D. The nations
5. Why was Abel's sacrifice accepted, according to Hebrews?
 - A. He offered animals instead of grain
 - B. He offered a larger amount
 - C. He offered by faith
 - D. He was the younger brother
6. What does the lecture call Hebrews' role toward Genesis 4?
 - A. An inspired commentary
 - B. A correction
 - C. An allegory
 - D. A separate tradition

7. Whom does Dr. Schreiner understand the sons of God in Genesis 6 to be?
 - A. The godly line of Seth
 - B. Ancient kings
 - C. Giants
 - D. Fallen angels, while noting that good men differ
8. The flood account is deliberately told to look like what?
 - A. The exodus
 - B. A re-creation of the world
 - C. The exile
 - D. A parable
9. What signals that Noah's covenant re-establishes the covenant with Adam?
 - A. The language of establishing rather than cutting a covenant
 - B. The size of the ark
 - C. The dove and the olive leaf
 - D. The altar Noah builds
10. In this lecture's picture, the rainbow is what?
 - A. A promise of fair weather
 - B. A memorial to the dead
 - C. God's war bow hung up: the race preserved until redemption is fulfilled
 - D. A sign for Israel alone
11. What survived the flood unchanged?
 - A. The serpent
 - B. The sin of the human heart
 - C. The tower
 - D. The giants
12. What is the fundamental sin at Babel and in Isaiah 14?
 - A. Poor craftsmanship
 - B. Worshiping statues
 - C. Speaking one language
 - D. Living as if we do not need God, making ourselves the Most High

Talk it over

1. The lecture says the war of the two offspring is still going on everywhere. Where do you see it this week, and what does the promise of Romans 16, that God will soon crush Satan beneath his people's feet, do to the way you stand in it?
2. Abel's works flowed from his faith, the root before the fruit. Where are you tempted to reverse that order, offering God fruit while the root goes dry?

3. Noah stepped off the ark into a washed world and sinned in a garden. What does that teach your family about where the real problem lives, and why no fresh start can fix it?

One verse to carry

Romans 16:20, the promise still standing: the God of peace will soon crush Satan beneath the feet of his people.

Go further

The establishing-versus-cutting covenant argument the lecture leans on is developed in Kingdom through Covenant by Peter Gentry and Stephen Wellum, the book named in Lecture 1.

Lecture 2 Comprehension Check

1. C. Through conflict, with the offspring himself struck (*outline section 1*)
2. D. Christ (*outline section 1*)
3. A. By new birth (*outline section 2*)
4. B. The children of the evil one (*outline section 2*)
5. C. He offered by faith (*outline section 4*)
6. A. An inspired commentary (*outline section 4*)
7. D. Fallen angels, while noting that good men differ (*outline section 6*)
8. B. A re-creation of the world (*outline section 9*)
9. A. The language of establishing rather than cutting a covenant (*outline section 10*)
10. C. God's war bow hung up: the race preserved until redemption is fulfilled (*outline section 10*)
11. B. The sin of the human heart (*outline section 11*)
12. D. Living as if we do not need God, making ourselves the Most High (*outline section 13*)