

From the Fall to Faith

John Houghton ©

A. Introduction

1. The fall of humankind soon led to murder and mayhem. From Cain to Noah (see chronological chart) the world degenerates rapidly into godlessness and wickedness. It is vivid evidence of rogue spiritual genes at work.
2. It also saw the emergence of faith. That faith was based on covenants initiated and sustained by God. God is a covenant God and this is one of the keys to understanding the Bible. Many errors of interpretation and conduct arise simply from failing to distinguish the covenants.
3. The fate of the firstborn is paramount and from this develops the 'faith firstborn' principle that runs right through to Christ and to all those in him through faith.

B. The faith firstborn principle

1. The firstborn inherits the blessing – this is a set of privileges and responsibilities known as the birthright. This principle of physical inheritance spiritually anticipates God's firstborn Son, i.e. the legitimate Son and Heir – see Colossians 1:15-18, and our own inheritance in him (Hebrews 12:23).
2. However, in spiritual terms the principle does not operate automatically. Without real faith it is impossible to please God. This faith is not simply 'belief', i.e. our views about God. It is only proven authentic when demonstrated by our faith actions (James 2:19-24).
3. So, the lineage of faith and blessing does not automatically follow the line of the natural firstborn (Romans 9:6-13). It all depends on faith demonstrated by behaviour. The patriarchal line of faith in Hebrews 11:1-22 reflects this principle.

C. The line of promise and the line of compromise

1. The murder of Abel by his brother Cain begins the contrast between the two lines.
 - a. Abel's faith offering anticipates the sacrificial death of Christ (Hebrews 11:4). Cain's fertility offering was a futile attempt at salvation by his own efforts. Are we saved by Christ's Good Friday sacrifice or by our Harvest Festival offering? (Genesis 4:1-8; Romans 3:25; Hebrews 9:22).
 - b. God wants a pilgrim people who trust him – people who walk by faith. Cain refused God's offer of protection from vengeance and built a city to protect himself. He became a settler (Genesis 4:15-17) rather than a pilgrim. The city comes to represent our desire for eternal life and security without God.

2. The line of promise begun with Abel extended to Enoch, a man of faith and a preacher of righteousness (Jude 14). However, most people were not of faith but of the flesh.
 - a. There are other sentient beings on the earth (Gen 6:1-4). We can only speculate as to who they were and the effects of intermarriage.
 - b. The poisonous effects of the fall deepened and the human race became so degenerate that God regretted his decision to create human beings (Genesis 6:5-7).
 - c. People lived long lives of wickedness, so God's first constraint was to limit human lifespan to 120 years (Genesis 6:3). His second was to send the Flood.

D. The Flood and the first church

1. Noah continues the line of promise (Genesis 6:8-9).
 - a. By faith Noah separated himself from the sinful world by building an ark of salvation (Hebrews 11:7). He inherited Christ's righteousness in anticipation of Calvary.
 - b. The ark was the first church – 1 Peter 3:18-20. This reminds us that salvation is not just an individual matter; to be saved is to become part of God's chosen people and to count ourselves among such.
2. The flood was global and uncompromising.
 - a. Some Creation scientists think that this involved the condensation of the water vapour canopy, perhaps brought about by the cooling of the earth. The precipitation shrunk the globe causing massive earthquakes, tectonic plate movements and volcanic eruption. The wild magnetic shifts produced 'instant' ice ages followed by tropical heat, carving out the landscape as we know it today and accounting for the fossil phenomena.
 - b. The judgement was absolute, but the notion of a faithful remnant with whom God will make covenant saves the human race. The fate of the world rests in the hands of eight such people.
 - c. Life expectancy is dramatically shortened after the Flood – see the chronological chart.
3. Judgement does not cure people of sin. Only grace can do that, but grace must be taken hold of by faith in the promises of God.
 - a. The line of promise continues through Noah's son Shem, though not all his descendants are people of faith. Those that were in the faith firstborn line are Shem, Arphaxad, Cainan, Salah, Eber, Peleg, Reu, Serug, Nahor, Terah. These all appear in the line of faith genealogy of Christ – Luke 3:34-36.
 - b. Ham mocked his father's nudity and was judged unworthy. He fathered Canaan whose offspring became notorious for their sexual sins and worship of the storm god, Baal. He who dishonours others dishonours himself and his family.

- c. Rebels against God on the Plain of Shinar built the Tower of Babel, so named because God confused their languages. Babel means 'confusion', hence Babylon. Such empire building is a repeat of Cain's sin of unbelief. (Genesis 4:14; 11:4). God, none the less, used this to fill the earth with people according to his command to Adam and Eve. (See Table of Nations).

E. Abraham the patriarch of the faithful

1. There are two kinds of descendent from Abraham, those of the flesh and those of the promise of faith. It is, of course, possible to be both.
 - a. The descent of promise has precedence. It is impossible to be saved by the line of the flesh – Romans 9:3-9, though there are promises of blessing for the natural descendants. Salvation for Jew and Gentile alike comes only through faith in Christ alone – Romans 10:12-13. Earthly advantage cannot make us any more or any less saved. No one understood this better than the apostle Paul – Philippians 3:4-11.
 - b. Terah, the father of Abram lived in Ur. He and the family migrated upriver towards Canaan but stopped at Haran, possibly in memory of his deceased son (Genesis 11:28). (See map). Abraham and Sarah in due course journeyed to Canaan at God's command and became pilgrims of faith.
2. Lot separated from Abraham and chose the fertile plain of Jordan near Sodom and Gomorrah – the location of exceedingly wicked people in whose city he dwelt (Genesis 13:8-13). Lot was taken as a ransom in a tribal feud, but was rescued by Abraham.
 - a. Later, God destroyed those cities because of their sins (Ezekiel 16:48-50; Jude 1:7) Lot, living there, barely escaped with his life, but his wife lost hers. His two daughters got him drunk in a cave and had sex with him. Their pregnancies produced Moab and Ammon (Genesis 19).
 - b. On the way back from rescuing Lot, Abraham met Melchisedek, the 'King of Righteousness and of Peace' (Genesis 14:18-20). They took communion and Abraham tithed to Melchisedek. Jesus is a permanent priest of this order (as opposed to the line of Levi) (Hebrews 5:6; 7:1-10). This is one argument for tithing to Christ under the new covenant.

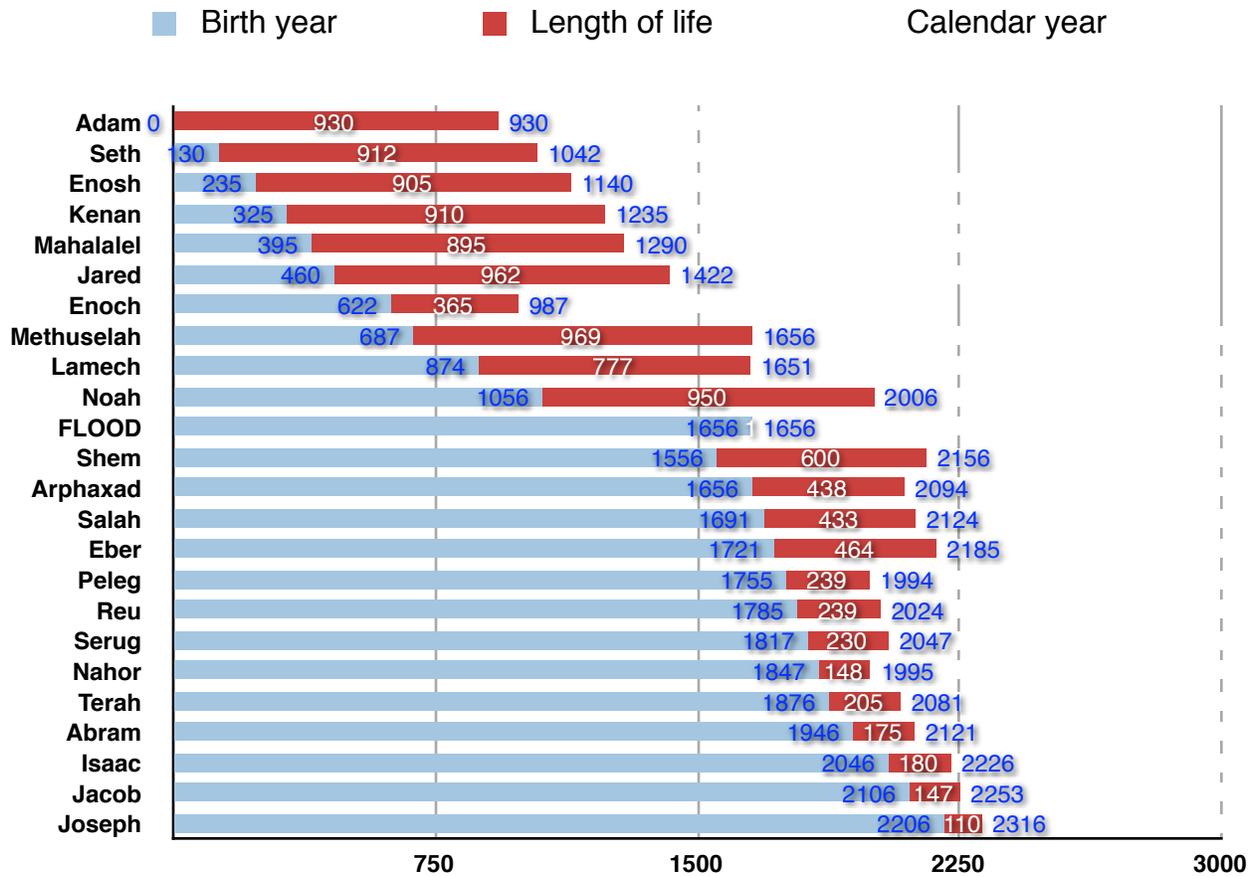
F. The God of Covenants

1. The covenant of Creation was made with Adam and Eve – Genesis 1:28-30; 2:16-17.
 - a. They are to have sexual relations and to produce offspring.
 - b. They are to become the dominant species on the planet.
 - c. They are to be vegetarians, nourished on seed as well as greenery.
 - d. They are to avoid the tree of the knowledge of good and evil.
2. The covenant of Providence was made with Noah – Genesis 8:20-9:17.

- a. God promised regularity to the seasons. There would be no more wild polar swings.
 - b. He reaffirmed the Creation commands to have children and to rule the world.
 - c. He allowed meat to be eaten, but not its blood. Note, vegetarianism had done nothing to curb wickedness!
 - d. He instituted the death penalty for proven murder as an absolute from which all human justice should derive.
 - e. He promised no further global flood and set the rainbow as his sign of mercy.
1. The covenant of Promise was made with Abraham – Genesis 12:1-3.
 - f. The covenant with Abraham is the basis for all God's salvation dealings.
 - g. It was national, personal and universal. He would father nations; he himself would be blessed; and the whole world would be blessed – this refers to Christ.
 - h. In Genesis 12:7 Abraham is promised the land of Canaan as his inheritance.
 - i. In Genesis 15 Abraham, putting his faith in God's word, is justified by faith. He is the spiritual father of all who share the same faith – Romans 4:3, 16-22; Galatians 3:6-9; James 2:22-24.
 - j. The covenant is initiated by God and is cut by him – *karat berith* means 'to cut a covenant'. This practice continues in the use of tally sticks and electronic passwords.
 2. (see *The Covenants*, John Houghton CWR *Cover to Cover* series).

G. Questions for reflection

1. Why can you not assume that you have faith just because you were born into a Christian family or had other natural advantages?
2. If Jesus is the firstborn, what does that make you?
3. What does it mean to you to have Abraham as your spiritual father?
4. How do the covenants of creation, providence and promise affect your daily living?



Chronology of Adam's heirs (Dated from Adam's creation as year zero)

