



From Shem to Abraham to Moses... Genesis 11:10-Exodus 2:10

I don't think I will ever forget the first time I went to see my first really, influential Bible teacher in person. His name was J. Vernon McGee...Dr. J. Vernon McGee. He used to have a program on the radio called "Through the Bible." It came on at noon and when I first became serious about my faith I listened to it every single day for seven or eight years...maybe longer. He taught me more about the Bible than any other single teacher I have ever had. Although Dr. McGee died in 1988, his radio program is still on the air being broadcast to some 200 countries in something like 100 languages. He continues to have an enormous impact. Now I say that even though I would have to add that today I disagree with a great many things Dr. McGee taught.

He was a dispensationalist. I am not.

He was a premillennialist. I am not.

He was an Amyraldian.¹ I am not. I am a Calvinist.

And I could go on but I won't. Those differences are important...very important but I still love Dr. McGee because he loved the Bible and taught me so much about the Bible and because somehow along the way he communicated to me his love for the Bible and his love for simplicity and clarity. Anyway, back in the later 70's he came to Dallas...a church called Town North Baptist and a friend of mine and I went over to see him. You would have thought I was going to see Spurgeon or even Calvin himself. I was absolutely beside myself with excitement

Anyway the pastor of the little church where we went to see him stood up to introduce him and said something like this, "I have the honor this evening of introducing to you somebody all of you already know. No doubt most of you have been riding the Bible bus with him a long time and already feel like old friends. Still I am happy this evening to introduce to you Dr. J. Vernon McGee. Dr. McGee is a humble man. Those of us that know and love him all agree that he has a lot to be humble about."

Everybody laughed and laughed out loud but nobody more so than Dr. McGee himself. I loved him even more for the fact that he was able to laugh at himself.

I bring up that little story up for a reason.

You see, three months ago we started our little study on covenant theology and when we did I decided to more or less start in the middle of things with the story of God's great covenant with Abraham. I did that because of the marvelous, clarity of God's grace in dealing with Abraham and because throughout the Bible there is a repeated effort on the part of a number of biblical writers to tie God's gracious dealings with His people back to the covenant with Abraham.

You can see that in the Book of Exodus right before God calls Moses to begin his ministry to bring the Israelites out of Egypt.

^{ESV} **Exodus 2:23**...During those many days the king of Egypt died, and the people of Israel groaned because of their slavery and cried out for help. Their cry for rescue from slavery came up to God. ²⁴ And God heard their groaning, and God remembered his covenant with Abraham, with Isaac, and with Jacob. ²⁵ God saw the people of Israel--and God knew.

And you can see the reference back to Abraham in lots of other places, even the New Testament.² Look for example at the passage where Zechariah the father of John the Baptist relates his son's birth and the coming of the Messiah back to God's promise to Abraham.

^{ESV} **Luke 1:68**..."Blessed be the Lord God of Israel, for he has visited and redeemed his people ⁶⁹ and has raised up a horn of salvation for us in the house of his servant David, ⁷⁰ as he spoke by the mouth of his holy prophets from of old, ⁷¹ that we should be saved from our enemies and from the hand of all who hate us; ⁷² to show the mercy promised to our fathers and to remember his holy covenant, ⁷³ the oath that he swore to our father Abraham, to grant us ⁷⁴ that we, being delivered from the hand of our enemies, might serve him without fear, ⁷⁵ in holiness and righteousness before him all our days.

So, we started with Abraham and worked through his calling by God in Genesis 12 and then we pressed on to where God established His covenant with him in Genesis 15.

There we witnessed God's dramatic oath to Abraham in which He vowed in a solemn blood oath never, ever to forsake His promise to Abraham. After that, we witnessed God reconfirming His oath to Abraham in Genesis 17. He did that in

spite of the fact that Abraham and Sarah had impatiently tried to speed up His promise in the tragic affair with Hagar and Ishmael.

Finally, in chapter 22 we witnessed Abraham coming to a place of mature confidence in the reality of God's faithfulness. In fact, we saw that his confidence in God was so strong that he was willing to obey God and to sacrifice his son Isaac as a burnt offering because he confidently believed that God would raise him from the dead.

Now after that...after three or four weeks of looking at his life and God's covenant with him we backed up and started looking at the Covenant of Redemption...the covenant between the various members of the Trinity before the creation of the world. The Covenant of Redemption is that covenant in which the members of the godhead agreed and covenanted together to redeem the elect.

After that, I moved forward to the Covenant of Works between God and Adam, our great federal representative, in the Garden of Eden. There we saw God's promise to him and we saw Adam's failure...and in Adam we saw our own failure...our consequent guilt and sinfulness. Still God was gracious because after that, we witnessed God graciously proclaiming the *proto-evangel* in the Garden and promising that He would deliver his people by means of a future seed...a seed that would crush the head of the serpent.

From there I went on to describe God's Covenant with Noah and His gracious delivery of Noah in the midst of a horrific, worldwide judgment. After that, we noticed God's wonderful kindness or common grace extended toward all

mankind in which he promised He would never, never again, destroy the world by flood.

In each of those lessons I tried to move forward...to make a small incremental move forward in time and in the development of God's wonderful Covenant of Grace. I tried to make the point that after mankind's fall in the Garden of Eden any dealing by God with sinful man short of killing him in judgment was a reflection of His marvelous, wonderful, matchless, grace. I tried to make that point by stressing the fact that there is only one Covenant of Grace.

I have tried to point out the fact that the various covenants with individuals in the course of God's redemptive history are more like episodes in the one, long continuous story than they are like individual or free-standing covenants. The various covenants are more like steps of a stairway. They are more like the Saturday segments of the old serial westerns you used to could watch at the theatre. They are more like the one hour segments of 24 than they are individual movies. They all connect and they all have one hero and that hero is not Adam or Noah or Abraham or Moses or David. That hero is the Lord Jesus Christ himself.

I have tried to make those points and more along the way and yet this morning I find myself having to admit that after three months of study and some ten to twelve hours of faithful, diligent, patient listening on your part that we have arrived this morning...finally, at last, right back where we started.

I was hoping you would laugh.

You see this morning we have come back to the story of Abraham. We've arrived exactly where we started out. I am making that point because we are twelve lessons into our study and it seems to me that we are not very apt to finish our current study before you break for summer vacation and I break for my rendezvous with an orthopedic surgeon.

Still I am not all that worried. We will have plenty time when we get back in the fall, if we get back in the fall, to pick up and press on to the end. In the meantime, we have enough time to cover some pretty significant...pretty complex material. In fact, I would say that we have at last begun to arrive at a spot where things heat up...where there is a measure of controversy and the opportunity for disagreement.

I say that because most people think that the controversy surrounding covenant theology focuses on the issue of infant baptism. I have to tell you, I don't think that's right. I think once you grant the unity of the one Covenant of Grace that the battle with regard to covenantal baptism is pretty much over. I think it's over in pretty much the same way that the battle over God's electing grace is over once a person grants the premise or point of total depravity. You see, I think that once you concede the unity of the Covenant of Grace and the fact that pretty much all of the covenants have a federal aspect to them...the application of a covenant sign to the seed of those in the covenant has to be pretty much accepted as obligatory. Still, I know that some of my friends here and elsewhere will disagree with me and will want to express their objections to such a sweeping conclusion and I want you to know we'll have time for that later on.

The point I want to make this morning is that the most difficult aspect of covenant theology doesn't actually revolve around infant baptism or the presence of the unconverted within the covenant community itself or anything like that. The most difficult aspect of covenant theology is trying to understand how the Mosaic Covenant fits within the Covenant of Grace. That is, it is trying to understand the relationship between the Mosaic Covenant and the Covenant of Grace. The principle question in covenant theology is concerned with how the Mosaic Covenant can fall under the Covenant of Grace when Paul seems to make the point in Galatians that the two covenants, the Mosaic Covenant and the Covenant of Grace, are at odds with each other.

Now I wanted to bring that up this morning, even though we won't actually get that far this morning. I wanted to bring that up because that is where most of the difficulty with covenant theology lies. The question of whether the Mosaic Covenant is part of the Covenant of Grace or part of the Covenant of Works is a question that has plagued expositors for three or four hundred years. I wanted to make that point because if you read much on covenant theology you will find that that is the issue that burns up the most ink. I wanted to make that point as sort of a teaser because that is where we are headed and those are some of the questions we will try to answer.

You see, we are headed to a consideration of how the Mosaic Covenant, which seems to be built upon a works principle, can ever be considered to be one of the integral components of the one Covenant of Grace which everywhere else seems to be built upon a principle of grace. We will get there, Lord willing, and even finish there before we break for the summer.

I have taken a bit of time this morning to explain that because I want you to know where we've been in our study...where we are and where we are going.

Now what I want to do this morning is to simply try to show you the link between Noah and Moses. I want to do that by showing you how the Bible links Shem to Abraham and Abraham to Moses.

Alright, that having been said, let's look at Genesis 10 together.

^{ESV} **Genesis 10:1**...These are the generations of the sons of Noah, Shem, Ham, and Japheth. Sons were born to them after the flood.

Now I made the point last week that there is a genealogy of Noah's sons given in Genesis 10 and it is given in a different order than the way the names of Noah's three boys are usually presented. Usually, their names are given in this order: Shem, Ham and Japheth. That is not in order of their age but rather the order of their importance.

Chronologically, Shem was the oldest son of Noah and the person from whom Abraham and the Israelites eventually descended.

Japheth was next to the oldest and Ham was the youngest.

Now in the genealogy given in Genesis chapter 10, the order of the boys is different yet again. The first boy mentioned is Japheth but his account is very short only four verses. You can see his account is given in Genesis 10:2-5. I think Japheth is mentioned first and then quickly disposed of because his line is the least

important to the Old Testament story simply because his descendants are farther removed from the geographical world of the Canaan and Egypt than the others. The line of Japeth doesn't really much enter into the story of redemption until the New Testament.

Noah's son Ham is listed next. His descendants are mentioned in Genesis 10:6-20. His line is mentioned next, I think, because it is the line from which many of Israel's enemies sprang...Babylon, Assyria, Egypt and Canaan. That doesn't mean, of course, that all of the descendants of Ham were enemies of Israel. There are a number of very famous characters in the Bible who profess their belief and faith in the God of Israel in spite the fact that they are sons of Ham. We talked about that a bit last week.

Ham is principally important here in this genealogy because he is the father of Canaan. That makes especially good sense in light of the fact that Moses wrote what he wrote about Ham and Canaan to explain to the Israelites the kind of people that the Canaanites were. He did that by relating the story of Noah and Ham and by relating the consequent curse on Canaan. He would have done that because the children of Israel were poised on the border of the land of Canaan about to enter into a conquest of the land. And you can see that the story of the Canaanites is more important to Moses' intention than the story of the sons of Japeth because they get 15 verses while Japeth's descendants only get four.

And then finally, Moses turns to the oldest and most important son, Shem. He does that in the verses extending from Genesis 10:21-10:32. Now Shem's genealogy is only eleven verses long and that might give you cause to think that Shem's line is less important than Ham's...but it's not. In fact, I think the

reason Moses puts him last in this particular list is because he is the most important.³ He is most important son of Noah because he is the blessed son of the covenant. He is the one who has received God's special blessing through his father Noah and he is the son through whom Abraham will come.⁴ Still if that doesn't convince you that that is what Moses is doing this might. In Genesis 11:10, Moses relates the genealogy of Shem a second time and when he does he expands the detail.

Look at Genesis 11:10.

^{ESV} **Genesis 11:10**...These are the generations of Shem. When Shem was 100 years old, he fathered Arpachshad two years after the flood.⁵

Now I want you to pay special attention to that word "**generations**". It is used some ten times in the Book of Genesis. Basically, the Book of Genesis is divided into 11 parts. There is an introduction, which occurs in 1:1-2:4, and that introduction is followed by 10 stories or accounts. In Hebrew, there is a particular word that sets off the ten stories and makes the sections identifiable. It is the word תּוֹלְדוֹת or if you want to try to remember it in English think "toll ...dot". Anyway the word תּוֹלְדוֹת marks off the ten stories that make up the book of Genesis. In English you can render the phrase something like "**this is the story of...**" or the "**this is what happened to...**" or something like the ESV does here as "**this is the account of...**"

Anyway, the 10 separate accounts or stories mentioned in the Book of Genesis occur after the introduction. The first use of the word "**generations**" occurs in Genesis 2:4.

^{ESV} **Genesis 2:4**...These are the **generations** of the heavens and the earth when they were created, in the day that the LORD God made the earth and the heavens.

This section (2:4-4:17...Heavens & Earth) contains 1,908 words and makes up about 5% of the Book of Genesis.

The second use of the word occur sin Genesis 5:1.

^{ESV} **Genesis 5:1**...This is the **book of the generations** of Adam. When God created man, he made him in the likeness of God.

This section (5:1...6:8...Adam) contains 777 words and makes up about 2% of the Book of Genesis.

The third use occurs in Genesis 6:9.

^{ESV} **Genesis 6:9**...These are the **generations** of Noah. Noah was a righteous man, blameless in his generation. Noah walked with God.

This section (6:9...9:29...Noah) contains 2,145 words and makes up about 6% of the Book of Genesis.

The fourth use occurs in Genesis 10:1.

^{ESV} **Genesis 10:1**...These are the **generations** of the sons of Noah, Shem, Ham, and Japheth. Sons were born to them after the flood.

This section (10:1...11:9...Shem, Ham & Japheth) contains 757 words and makes up about 2% of the Book of Genesis.

The fifth use occurs in Genesis 11:10.

^{ESV} **Genesis 11:10**...These are the **generations** of Shem. When Shem was 100 years old, he fathered Arpachshad two years after the flood.

This section (11:10...11:26...Shem) contains 289 words and makes up about 1% of the Book of Genesis.

The sixth use of the word occurs in Genesis 11:27.

^{ESV} **Genesis 11:27**...Now these are the generations of Terah. Terah fathered Abram, Nahor, and Haran; and Haran fathered Lot.

This section (11:27...25:11...Terah...*really Abraham*) contains 9,708 words and makes up about 26% of the Book of Genesis.

The seventh use of the word occurs in Genesis 25:12.

^{ESV} **Genesis 25:12**...These are the generations of Ishmael, Abraham's son, whom Hagar the Egyptian, Sarah's servant, bore to Abraham.

This section (25:12...25:18...Ishmael) contains 141 words or less than 1% of the Book of Genesis.

The eighth use of the word occurs in Genesis 25:19.

^{ESV} **Genesis 25:19**...These are the **generations** of Isaac, Abraham's son: Abraham fathered Isaac,

This section (25:19...35:29...Isaac *really Jacob*) contains 9,040 words or about 24% of the Book of Genesis.

The ninth use of the word occurs in Genesis 36:1.

^{ESV} **Genesis 36:1**...These are the generations of Esau (that is, Edom).

This section (36:1...37:1...Esau) contains 873 words or about 3% of the Book of Genesis.

^{ESV} **Genesis 36:1**... These are the generations of Esau (that is, Edom).

And then finally the last use occurs in Genesis 37:2.

^{ESV} **Genesis 37:2**...These are the generations of Jacob. Joseph, being seventeen years old, was pasturing the flock with his brothers. He was a boy with the sons of Bilhah and Zilpah, his father's wives. And Joseph brought a bad report of them to their father.

This section (37:2...50:22...Jacob *really Joseph*) contains 11,586 words or about 31% of the Book of Genesis.

Now the first section of Genesis functions as an introduction. The other ten sections make up the narrative of Genesis. They are ten stories and they are there for a particular reason. Now one thing that is interesting is that the title of the account does not always strictly match the content of the account. For example, the story of Terah is not really about Terah at all; it is about Abraham. The story of Isaac is not about Isaac in the normal sense; it is about Jacob. And the story of

Jacob is not really about Jacob; it is about Joseph. I think if you simply focus on those three characters and the fact that together they make up 81% of the Book of Genesis you can get a pretty good idea as to what Moses is up to.

You see, Moses wrote the book of Genesis to catechize the children of Israel. The whole of the Pentateuch was written to them to recount all that God had done for them and to them but Genesis, in particular, was their prehistory and was written to catechize them. Moses wrote Genesis for them and to them to let them know where they came from, who their God was and what their God was like. Certainly, Moses could have spent a lot more time on the creation of the world or the fall of man had he chosen. But Moses' purpose wasn't about that principally. His intention was fairly focused. You see he was trying to explain to them who they were, where they had come from, and why they were taking the land of Canaan in conquest. If you think about the original readers, they would have been a ragtag bunch of ex-slaves. It's not they knew nothing...but rather that much of who they were and why that mattered had been lost. The only world most of them had ever known was a world of slavery and oppression. They had lost much of their identity. And yet God had delivered them out of their bondage and suffering. And they were about to enter a promised land...a land that flowed with milk and honey. So Moses tried to give them an understanding of how they had come to be who they were and how God was in truth their God in a way that He was not the God of any other people on earth. The book of Genesis is God's word given through Moses to remind them of their heritage.

And so when Moses gets to the story of Abraham he really expands the narrative. He carefully develops Abraham's historical context. He reminds the Israelites that Abraham did so and so in this valley or on that mountain or under

this tree. He tells the great stories of Abraham, and Jacob and Joseph...not myths, or legends but stories...true stories. He tells them true stories about their sin and their unbelief and about the devastating consequences of their disobedience. But more than that, he tells them stories about God's grace and kindness and covenantal faithfulness. Those stories would have been particularly meaningful for the children of Israel wandering around in the Sinai desert.

Those stories would have become ingrained in their hearts and minds and would have had the effect of warning them not to go on in unbelief and disobedience. They would have had the effect of preparing them to live in the land and to live in light of God's covenant. The stories were not there, as some modern scholars have suggested, to explain why people are afraid of snakes or why there was so much salt around Dead Sea.

Finally, the book of Genesis would have had the effect of connecting them with the reality of God's covenantal promise and faithfulness. For as the people marched along...up in front of the crowd and mass of people there would have been a certain number of men carrying the mummified remains of Joseph on their shoulders.⁶ The people could have looked at the gilded coffin and been reminded of how God in His faithfulness had delivered Joseph. Hearing the stories of Joseph's plight and his final exaltation they would have been reminded that his God was indeed their God and that they were going back to the same land of promise he had left. They were going to the same land of promise traversed by Abraham, and Isaac and Jacob.

Joseph, they would have thought, was finally headed home.

But so, in fact, were they. They were headed home but first they were headed to a meeting with the very God that had delivered them from their bondage. That meeting was to take place on the backside of the Sinai desert near the place where Moses had first met God at the burning bush.

Let's pray.

¹ Amyraldianism is named after Moses Amyraut, 1569-1664. It is often called four-point Calvinism because it rejects the idea of limited atonement arguing instead for a universal atonement.

² **ESV Luke 1:46**...And Mary said, "My soul magnifies the Lord, ⁴⁷ and my spirit rejoices in God my Savior, ⁴⁸ for he has looked on the humble estate of his servant. For behold, from now on all generations will call me blessed; ⁴⁹ for he who is mighty has done great things for me, and holy is his name. ⁵⁰ And his mercy is for those who fear him from generation to generation. ⁵¹ He has shown strength with his arm; he has scattered the proud in the thoughts of their hearts; ⁵² he has brought down the mighty from their thrones and exalted those of humble estate; ⁵³ he has filled the hungry with good things, and the rich he has sent away empty. ⁵⁴ He has helped his servant Israel, in remembrance of his mercy, ⁵⁵ as he spoke to our fathers, to Abraham and to his offspring forever."

ESV Deuteronomy 29:10..."You are standing today all of you before the LORD your God: the heads of your tribes, your elders, and your officers, all the men of Israel, ¹¹ your little ones, your wives, and the sojourner who is in your camp, from the one who chops your wood to the one who draws your water, ¹² so that you may enter into the sworn covenant of the LORD your God, which the LORD your God is making with you today, ¹³ that he may establish you today as his people, and that he may be your God, as he promised you, and as he swore to your fathers, to Abraham, to Isaac, and to Jacob.

ESV 2 Kings 13:23...But the LORD was gracious to them and had compassion on them, and he turned toward them, because of his covenant with Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob, and would not destroy them, nor has he cast them from his presence until now.

ESV 1 Chronicles 16:14...He is the LORD our God; his judgments are in all the earth. ¹⁵ Remember his covenant forever, the word that he commanded, for a thousand generations, ¹⁶ the covenant that he made with Abraham, his sworn promise to Isaac, ¹⁷ which he confirmed as a statute to Jacob, as an everlasting covenant to Israel, ¹⁸ saying, "To you I will give the land of Canaan, as your portion for an inheritance."

³ U. Cassuto, *A Commentary on The Book of Genesis: Part II From Noah To Abraham Genesis VI 9 -XI 32* (Skokie, Illinois: Varda Books, 1989...This is an electronic version of the book originally published by Magnes Press), 198. Cassuto writes, "After the genealogy of the sons of Japheth, the oldest of the sons of Noah, the Bible gives us the pedigree of the sons of Ham, the third son, in

order to leave to the end—as the climax—Shem, who, although the middle one in order of birth, was the most important of them, since he was the primogenitor of the people of Israel. The Torah first completes the genealogy of Japheth and Ham so as to dispose of the subject and avoid the need to revert to it later; whereas the account of Shem's offspring, who are central to the narrative, will continue in the subsequent chapters."

⁴ Cassuto, 250. "Out of the three branches of mankind spoken of in chapter x that of the sons of Shem is chosen here—the one from which the progenitor of the Israelite people will be descended—and we are given the genealogy of this branch, through successive generations, in a form similar to that found in chapter v, which details the pedigree of the antediluvian world patriarchs. And just as in chapter v the genealogy in the tenth generation reaches Noah, the father of the new, post-diluvian humanity, so here the pedigree in the tenth generation gives us Abram-Abraham, the founder of the Israelite microcosm, which parallels the macrocosm of all mankind. The last paragraph of the section serves as another point of transition, this time from the record of the offspring of Shem collectively to the sections that deal specifically with the biography of Abraham."

⁵ Cassuto, 260. Cassuto writes, "Shem, the ancestor of Abraham, is like Abraham also in this respect, that his eldest son was born to him when he was a hundred years old, the age at which Abraham's first son by Sarah was born."

⁶ **ESV Exodus 13:19**...Moses took the bones of Joseph with him, for Joseph had made the sons of Israel solemnly swear, saying, "God will surely visit you, and you shall carry up my bones with you from here."