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Following the Flood, the eight remaining humans, Noah, his three sons, and their wives, were met with the challenge of remaking human civilization. In this issue we will explore, according to the Bible, what this task must have involved. Also, the son of Noah who becomes the heir of the holy lineage, Shem, will be briefly discussed. Consequently, we will identify the enigmatic character Melchizedek, who later blesses Abraham.

—David D. Mahoney

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1. Monthly Topic: The Post-Flood World

Following the deluge, Noah, his three sons, and their wives would have been faced with the enormous challenge of remaking the world for human (and animal) habitation. Assuming that this event did happen as the Bible describes, they would have also been responsible for repopulating the earth. Aside from being one of only eight humans left on earth, each of these individuals was faced with the reality of a destroyed world.

The traditions about the changes that happened to the earth through the Flood, and the hypotheses of scientific speculation of its condition are fascinating. If, as the Bible and Jewish tradition states, the seasons were only created following the Flood, the eight remaining survivors would have been faced with a frightening new world. They would have never before seen snow, or experienced the scorching heat of summer. The atmosphere itself may have changed, altering the color of the sky. Of course, also, the animal kingdom became hostile; animals that were tame before the Flood were now a threat to human safety.

Furthermore, if the Bible is accurate about the long life spans attained prior to the Flood, they would have also experienced death sooner. In fact, according to the dates given in the Bible on Noah's lineage, his direct descendants outlived their offspring by many years, for some by many decades. If one does the calculations on the birth and death dates of the patriarchs following Noah through Shem, one will find that Noah was still alive during Abraham's early years, and that Shem actually outlived Abraham. Seeing not only your children, but also your grandchildren and great grandchildren die would be traumatic, to say the least.

Therefore, the intrepid eight survivors were faced with challenges unique to the human race to date. One can only imagine what it must have been like stepping off the Ark, only to see a world pulverized by the forces of nature. There may have been some structures still standing if they were as solid as the pyramids of Egypt, but the finer things of civilization were gone. It was now their task to repopulate the world, cultivate the ground for food, and care for the animals that may need help surviving in a ravished world.

Since Noah was the father of Shem, Ham, and Japheth, the future inhabitants of the earth can be divided into three categories, being mainly descended from one of these three men and their wives. Many scholars, both ancient and modern, have attempted to trace the identity of the ethnicities of the world back to one of these three men. Although we may not be able to know with great certainty, there are widely held traditions dating to biblical times. For instance, one of the descendants of Ham listed in Genesis is Mizraim (changed to *Egypt* in Greek); thus the Egyptians, and generally those descendants dwelling in Africa were most likely of the family of Ham. Also, the historian Josephus, living in the first century, recorded in his *Antiquities of the Jews*, that the Greeks were the descendants of Japheth. He gives other details as well, some of which are no longer traceable because they refer to such ancient groups of people. As for the descendants of Shem, the most famous are of course the Jewish people, but he was also the father of the Chaldeans (Babylonians), and is thought to be the father of many of the eastern peoples, such as the Chinese.

Unfortunately, however, tracing the descendants of the three sons of Noah has been a source of racism. Many justified slavery of the black Africans because of the curse given in the Bible upon the descendants of Ham (Genesis 9:20-27). Some went so far as to view the color of their skin as a mark of the curse. While this misuse is lamentable, tracing the ancestry of humanity back to the three sons of Noah can be an

interesting and rewarding endeavor. Although the academic and secular communities usually view these genealogies as merely a part of the religious devices of Judaism, nothing can really be done to disprove that humanity has descended from three original male siblings. In which case, the genealogical records of Genesis may be a valuable record of the history of human propagation. Although usually viewed as boring, the genealogies may have very well served to make the Bible relevant to the real world. One of the reasons why the Christians ultimately accepted the Hebrew Bible into their canon (as the Old Testament) was due to its claim to antiquity. The growing Christian community during the first few centuries boasted that their religion was more ancient (thus more credible) than the Greek religions, or even the Jewish religion, because they practiced the faith of the patriarchs before Moses gave the Jewish law. Such a claim to antiquity and exclusivity on human origins has certainly been a boon for the religion of the Hebrew Bible and its successors, Christianity and Islam.

In summary, according to the Bible, the entire world following the Flood was repopulated and rebuilt through the efforts of only four men and their wives. It most certainly was an enormous and unprecedented task. Especially if they outlived their descendants, it would have been a wonder to behold civilization rise again, though with greater mortality, yet perhaps with greater ingenuity. As for religious development, Noah would have even seen Abraham grow into a man who would later father the holy people.

2. Patriarch Biography: Shem

Of the three sons of Noah—Shem, Ham, and Japheth—Shem is recognized within biblical tradition as being the rightful heir even though he was not the eldest. Although some apocryphal texts may list these three sons in differing orders of birth, the common understanding is that *Japheth* was the firstborn, *Shem* the second, and *Ham* the last. They are not listed in this order in Genesis, however, because the order of their honor did not correspond to the order of their birth. Shem is always listed first, because his appointment exceeded that of his brethren. For this reason, the birth and death dates of the descendants of Ham and Japheth are not given in Genesis; but the lineage of Abraham is meticulously traced from Shem, giving both the birth and death dates of each intermediate individual.

Therefore, Shem is recognized as the most blessed son of Noah and a particularly distinguished individual in his own right. In Hebrew his name is שֵׁם, pronounced as *shame*, and literally means “name,” as in honor, recognition, or repute. According to tradition he had the distinction of being the first king and priest in the new world following the Flood. Most Bible believers are familiar with the character of Melchizedek, the priest-king who blessed Abraham, and to whom Abraham paid tithes. Many Christians have identified him as a theophany (an appearance of Jesus before becoming flesh), but this is not the traditional view of his identity. According to Jewish tradition, Melchizedek is not a pre-incarnation of God or a heavenly being of some kind, but none other than Shem.

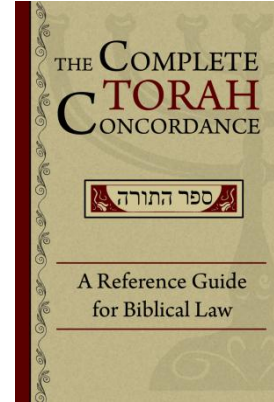
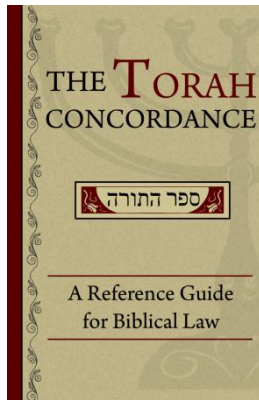
For Christianity, this interpretation is somewhat of a problem. The book of Hebrews in the New Testament states that he was without genealogy, without mother or father. The New Testament does not always agree with the long-held traditions concerning the Hebrew Bible, so this statement is not surprising. However, it is important to recognize that the Hebrew Bible maintains that the early patriarchs of the post-Flood world lived many centuries before human life spans began to decrease. Shem, in fact, in addition to outliving his father Noah also outlives his descendants to the ninth generation, with the sole exception of his great grandson, Eber. For the people living during Shem’s final years, it may have seemed that he was without genealogy, and certainly without father and mother, because he had outlived them by more than a century.

Even the Book of Jasher relates that Shem was Melchizedek. He founded the city of Jerusalem in Palestine, and reigned from that city as priest and king of God. Josephus relates that God gave the ancients long life because they were beloved, had better food, and to learn astronomical and astrological data that had to be observed over a long period of time. He states that the Great Year is 600 years; incidentally, Shem lived for 600 years. Shem is traditionally believed to be the father of most of the middle-eastern peoples, including the Chaldeans. The Chaldeans are well known for their observation and knowledge of the stellar bodies. One may assume that the biblical tradition is suggesting that Shem was the benefactor of this knowledge.

So, in addition to being a righteous predecessor and ancestor of the Jewish people, Shem was also a contributor of scientific knowledge. He is understood to have been a personal tutor of all three of the Jewish patriarchs, Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob. Though perhaps not so well known, he is certainly one of the most important figures in biblical tradition. In fact, hatred of the Jewish people is said to be anti-Semitic, which is derived from Shem’s name, even though the Jewish people are not his only descendants.

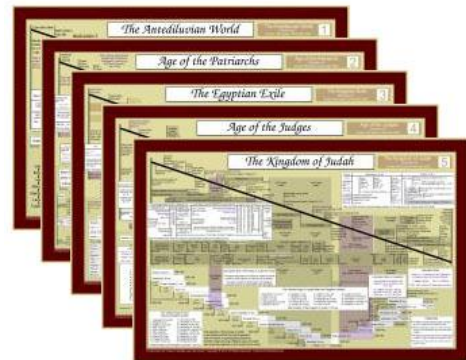
3. Products of the “Hebrew Heritage Learning Center”

The Complete Torah Concordance contains three organized lists of all of the commandments of the Bible. Using this book, the student can easily find any biblical law and locate its context. It is also available as an eBook on the website.



The Torah Concordance is the Systematic Order of the above version. It is available for purchase separately for those who would like the concordance at a more affordable price. This is a valuable option, since it contains the primary list of the book.

These five charts, gloss printed on 17x11 inch poster stock, detail each successive period of the Old Testament in chronological order, with dates indicating the year from creation. They can be purchased as a set or individually.



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