

Class: God is a Covenantal God

Objective – *The class objective is to introduce the class to the various covenants of the Old Testament. Students should be able to walk away with an understanding of what the covenants are, why they are important in the context of Salvation History, and have a basic understanding of the book of Genesis and Exodus.*

KEY TERMS AND DEFINITIONS

1. Covenant – a solemn pact between two or more parties. In a scriptural context, the two parties are God and humanity. Unlike a contract, which can be broken by either party, a covenant is permanent and unbreakable.
2. Antediluvian Period – The historical period of time between the creation of Adam and Eve and the great flood. This time saw the development of two lineages from Adam, the Cainite lineage and the Sethite lineage.
3. Cainites – The descendants of Cain who succumbed to sin and wickedness. They can be referred to as “daughters of men” in Genesis.
4. Sethites – The descendants of Seth who stayed faithful to God. They are referred to as “sons of God” in Genesis and succumb to intermarrying and partaking in immoral activities with their Cainite counterparts.
5. Nephilim – Often interpreted as “large or giant men” but also interpreted as “fallen ones” or even “tyrant men.” Different biblical teachings highlight that whoever the Nephilim were, they were immoral and continued to corrupt the people of the time.
6. Noahide Covenant – The eternal promise made between God and Noah in which God promises never to destroy all life again as He did with the flood.
7. Abrahamic Covenant – God’s eternal promise made between God and Abraham. God’s promise is threefold to Abraham – first that he is promised a specific land for him and his descendants to flourish in, second is the promise that he will make Abraham and his descendants “a great nation” promising his descendants will be as innumerable as the stars, third God promises to bless Abraham and his offspring.
8. Mosaic Covenant – The eternal promise God makes with Moses. The promise consists of God delivering His chosen people from evil and continuing to provide them protection and provisions.
9. Davidic Covenant – God’s promise with David that the messiah “anointed one” will come from his lineage. Uniquely this covenant did not require anything in return from His people.
10. Covenantal Symbols – Physical signs of God’s promises made.

Descendants of Noah and the Table of Nations

Japheth and His Descendants

Japheth is represented as the ancestor of various Anatolian and Mediterranean nations lying to the north and west of Israel

Yawan (Javan) – originally Ionia, the dwelling place of Greeks in western Turkey; later Greece in general.

Madai – the Medes of N.W. Iran.

Ashkenaz – the Scythians, who emigrated from Siberia to Ukraine (the furthest north of the nations listed).

Several places in **Asia Minor** (modern Turkey).

Japheth's name is probably related to that of the Titan Iapetus, attested in Greek mythology, who was the ancestor of the Hellenistic peoples, just as Japheth is the ancestor of the Greeks and other Mediterranean peoples. Iapetus's wife, Klymene, was given the name Asia, thus indicating a connection with Anatolia (Asia Minor, modern Turkey), which features strongly among the sons of Japheth. There is no known Greek etymology for the name Iapetus.

The sons of **Yawan** represent Mediterranean peoples.

Elishah – Cypriots of Greek or other non-Phoenician origin.

Tarshish – the furthest western place mentioned in Genesis 10, though its precise location is disputed. Various biblical references imply that Tarshish was a distant place in the west reached by sea (Ps 72:10; Isa 66:19; Jon 1:2; cf. 4:2), a point reinforced by the fact that ships going to distant places like Ophir were called "ships of Tarshish" (1 Kgs 10:22; 22:49 [*22:48]; Isa 2:16; 23:1, 14; 60:9). Tarshish is traditionally equated with Tartessos in southern Spain, which produced the same metals that the Bible attributes to Tarshish and that the Phoenicians brought back to the Levant.

Kittim – also Cypriots, especially those of Phoenician origin, a name derived from the Phoenician site of Kition, on the east coast of Cyprus.

Rodanim – the island of Rhodes (emending Hebrew MT Dodanim, with the Septuagint, Samaritan Pentateuch, and 1 Chr 1:7).

Ham and His Descendants

Ham is especially represented as the father or ancestor of various peoples in north Africa around Egypt and of various places in Arabia, but also curiously of the Canaanites (as well as a few others like Cretans and Lydians). The origin of the name Ham is uncertain, but we can say that "the land of Ham" elsewhere in the Bible refers to or at least includes Egypt (Ps 78:51; 105:23, 27; 106:22; 1 Chr 4:40).

The immediate sons of Ham are said to be -

Kush – Although traditionally rendered "Ethiopia," Kush is actually northern Sudan and Egypt south of Aswan, the area sometimes known as Nubia.

Egypt – in Hebrew *mitzrayim*.

Put – Put is Libya (not Punt, which has a *t* not *ʔ*, and an *n*).

Canaan – this embraces both the area of Palestine/Israel and also modern Lebanon (the latter occupied by the Phoenicians).

Kush is the ancestor of various places, mainly in Arabia, including -

Havilah – in southern Arabia. The name is duplicated in verse 29 under Shem.

Dedan – an oasis and city-state in north-west Arabia.

Sheba – the kingdom of Saba in south-west Arabia, modern Yemen, made famous by the story of the Queen of Sheba's visit to Solomon. It is called "a distant land," in Jeremiah 6:20, and, "far off," in Joel 4:8 [*3:8]. Later it was misidentified as Ethiopia, as in Josephus (*Jewish Antiquities*, 2:10.2 §249; 8:6.5 §165) and the Ethiopian national epic, *Kebra Negast*. Sheba is duplicated in verse 28 under Shem.

Seba – in east Africa. This name seems related to Sheba. Sheba and Seba are the most southerly places in the table of the nations.

Canaan is the father of Sidon and Heth, the latter designating the Hittites. The second set of names descended from Canaan are in the plural suggesting peoples rather than eponymous individual ancestors of nations:

In Palestine – Jebusites, Amorites, Girgashites, and Hivites.

In Phoenicia – Arkites, Sinites, Arvadites, Zemarites, and Hamathites. The names are cited in correct geographical order from south to north, with the exception of the Zemarites, who should come just before, not after the Arvadites.

The switch to the plural forms and the fact that several of the Canaanites listed here lived north of Sidon, even though Sidon is said to be the northern boundary of Canaan, suggests that this list of peoples is a later addition.

The identification of Canaan as a descendant of Ham is unexpected. Ethnically and linguistically, the Canaanites were Semitic, and geographically they were closer to some of the descendants of Shem than to the descendants of Ham. Some scholars have therefore suggested that this list reflects knowledge of the Late Bronze Age when Egypt ruled Canaan, but this is unlikely, since the Bible elsewhere shows no knowledge of this history. It is far more likely a consequence of Israelite hostility to the Canaanites, and thus the desire to say that Israelites and Canaanites have different ancestors. Nations included under Ham seem to reflect peoples toward whom the Israelites felt a certain distance or antipathy.

Shem and His Descendants

Shem, whose name lies behind our word "Semitic," is the ancestor of various countries that are mostly in western Asia:

Elam – in north-west Iran, the most eastern location mentioned in Genesis 10. Although included amongst the sons of Shem, Elam was not Semitic and Elamite is not a Semitic

language. Presumably, Elam is listed here because of its geographical location east of Mesopotamia, represented by the next two sons of Shem, Asshur and Arpachshad. The name Elam is found in the Hebrew Bible as late as the exile (cf. Isa 21:2), but from the time of Cyrus the Persian's conquest of Babylon (539 B.C.E.) onwards it is always called Persia in the Bible.

Asshur – Assyria, in northern Mesopotamia (modern Iraq).

Arpachshad – Coming after Elam (Persia) and Asshur (Assyria), it denotes Chaldea (Babylonia, in southern Mesopotamia), as already recognized in antiquity. The second part of the name plausibly relates to *kašdīm*, the Hebrew name for the Chaldeans, but the first part of the name has proved puzzling to scholars. Possibly the name is a deliberate distortion of , “land of Chaldea,”

Lud – Lydia in western Asia Minor

Aram – Syria. This nation gave its name to the Aramaic language.

Eber is the grandson of Arpachshad, but he is specially highlighted at the beginning of the section on Shem: Sons were also born to Shem, ancestor of all the descendants of Eber and older brother of Japheth.

The name Eber (‘*eber*) is a back-formation, a word formed from the already existing ethnic designation ‘*ibri*, “Hebrew,” so in effect Eber is Mr. Hebrew, the eponymous ancestor of the Hebrews. As such, he is the ancestor of Abraham and the subsequent Israelites, though Israel is not mentioned until later in Genesis (like Israel's neighbours Moab, Ammon and Edom, amongst others). Eber has two sons:

Peleg – Abraham is descended from Eber's son Peleg, as noted in Genesis 11:16–26. The geographical identity of Peleg is uncertain, though Phaliga at the junction of the Khabur and Euphrates rivers has been suggested.

Joktan – His descendants include as many as 13 place names of nations in **southern Arabia**, which implies a remarkable sense of kinship between Israel and the Arabs.

Southern Arabia was an important source of the spice and gold trade. Some of the names in verses 26–29 are somewhat obscure but the best known are Ophir and Sheba. Ophir was especially noted for its gold. In the past Ophir was sometimes thought of as an imaginary land like Eldorado, but this was disproved by the discovery of an 8th century B.C.E. ostrakon from Tel Qasile, which mentions “gold of Ophir to Beth-Horon, 30 shekels.” Others sometimes located Ophir in far off places like southern Africa or India. It was almost certainly in southern Arabia, however, as it is listed between Sheba and Havilah in Genesis 10:29, and all the other identifiable Joktanites were there.

Uz, a descendant of Aram, is mentioned as the home of Job (cf. Job 1:1). Scholars have debated whether Uz is located in Edom/North Arabia or Syria. Most of the evidence supports the former location. Thus, in Genesis 36:28, Uz is listed among the descendants of Esau (Edom), and in Lamentations 4:21 Edom is described as “dwelling in the land of Uz.” Furthermore, two of Job's so-called comforters come from Edom (Eliphaz the Temanite) and north Arabia (Bildad the Shuhite; cf. Gen 25:2), while the additional man, Elihu the Buzite, came from Buz (Jer 25:23, mentioned alongside Uz in Gen 22:21).

