Congregation of the Lord Jesus Christ,

As I explained last week, this sermon series was only ever intended to cover the first 11 chapters of Genesis. And that means that today we come to the last sermon of the series. We began back on Nov 13 of last year, and this will be the 33rd sermon of the series. And we have taken the time to work carefully through these chapters because they are foundational for understanding the rest of the Bible. They introduce and reveal God’s plan of salvation, truth and morality, our origins and our future, our world and its ideologies, and the glory and goodness of God. And I want to thank you for the incredible privilege of being able to work through this series with you. Each week has truly been a voyage of discovery. And it has been a joy to hear so many of you share things you have learned or come to understand and appreciate, which have been things that I have come to learn and appreciate as I have prepared the sermons during the week.

Well, the passage before us today is more genealogy. We saw earlier in the series that 11 times throughout Genesis we come across the words: “***These are the generations of*…**” They are the major sections of Genesis. The first was in chapter 2 and was in relation to the heavens and the earth. But the other 10 relate to persons. And so, we have already seen one about the generations of Adam, one about the generations of Noah, and one about the generations of Noah’s sons. And today we come to the next two – the generations of Shem and Terah. So, I want to take these genealogies, and the fact that this is the last sermon in the series, to consider a general point about reading and understanding Scripture, and especially the Old Testament. So, that will be the first point of this morning’s sermon: How are we to read and understand and benefit from the Old Testament? And once we have seen that, we will explore these two genealogies in the light of our first point.

1. So, first of all: **How are we to read and understand and benefit from the Old Testament**?
   1. And here is why it is worthwhile thinking about this. Last Saturday, Chris Ploeg and I were present for Vicar Peter Yoo’s presbytery examination. And the first part of his examination was the sermon part. He had been assigned a passage by a minister, and he had to preach on that passage to all who were present. And the way it works is that he sends out a written copy of the sermon two weeks before the exam. And two ministers must assess the sermon and report on it at the meeting, but all presbytery delegates need to assess it beforehand also. And over the years, seven criteria have been set down as the boxes that need to be ticked in order for a pass to be given to the sermon. And these include things like doctrinal correctness, exegetical accuracy, and being Christ-centred. But another of the criterion is that **the sermon takes into account the context, including the historical redemptive context**. And that is what I want us to focus on in this point: What is the historical redemptive context? Why is it specifically identified as necessary for a sermon to be faithful and edifying? Now, whole books have been written about this topic and there have been many big debates at synods and seminaries, so we can only be brief today. But while it applies to the whole Bible, it is especially important with regards to the Old Testament. Let me explain why this is so:
      1. I shared with you some time ago that we had a visitor at a service who was disillusioned with the inner-city church he had been attending. Since becoming a Christian 5 years ago, not once had he heard a reading or a sermon from the Old Testament in a worship service. And that church will not be the only one that doesn’t bother reading the Old Testament.
      2. And in many churches that do read the Old Testament, sermons will be of the ‘you can kill your giants like David did’ or ‘be brave like Esther’ or ‘Don’t run away from your problems like Jonah did’ variety. And these are what we call **moralistic sermons**. And we can and must learn from the good and bad examples in the Bible. But that is all that the sermons I am talking about teach. And that is not the main purpose of why the accounts of David or Esther or Jonah, etc, are recorded in the Bible.
      3. But sadly, in many churches today, the Old Testament is viewed as beginning with a quaint creation myth, which we can ignore because, you know, science knows better, and then it’s just a bunch of mainly violent, and often odd, and just a few cute stories, and lots of laws. And so, according to them, that makes the Old Testament pretty much irrelevant for New Testament believers, who are all about grace and the love of Jesus for everyone. And as for the genealogies? Well, the only thing they are useful for is if you want a kind of weird name for your baby :-)
   2. Well, we have noted in a previous sermon that **this is certainly not how the Lord Jesus viewed the Old Testament**. The Old Testament was His Bible, and it was ultimately about Him. On the day that He rose from the dead, you will remember that He appeared to two people who were walking to Emmaus. They were devastated that Jesus had died. All their hopes for Him as the promised Messiah had been dashed. But we are told that “*beginning with Moses and all the Prophets (meaning the Old Testament), [Jesus] interpreted to them in all the Scriptures the things concerning Himself*.” So, if you want a full understanding of who Jesus is and what He came to earth to do, you must read the Old Testament. But further than that, think about something like the Lord’s Prayer. We find it in the New Testament. And we think of it as a New Testament prayer. But where did Jesus learn that prayer, in terms of its content? How did He know that this is how we, as New Testament believers, ought to pray? From His study of the Old Testament!
   3. But listen also to this verse from **Galatians 4:4**: “*But when the fullness of time had come, God sent … His Son, born of woman, born under the law, to redeem those who were under the law, so that we might receive adoption as sons*.” And the fulness of time, God sending His Son, His being born *of a woman* and *under the law*, to redeem and secure adoption, only makes sense in light of the Old Testament. You simply cannot fully appreciate the person and work of your Saviour apart from the history of redemption. And here are just a few examples of the many big-picture aspects of God’s plan of salvation that the OT history of redemption reveals.
      1. Maybe you have heard before that the **simplest summary of the story of the whole Bible** is Creation/Fall/Salvation/New creation. Or, to fill it out a bit more, how we got here, why we are like we are, how we can be saved, and where we are going. But it starts way back in creation. And then, after the Fall, God promised to send a child, born of a woman, to crush the head of the serpent. And the promise is developed and more about it is unfolded throughout the Old Testament. And had its first fulfilment when Jesus came the first time, but it will have its ultimate fulfilment when He comes again to bring in the new heavens and new earth.
      2. Another example of big-picture of the Bible themes that we have repeatedly referred to in recent weeks is God’s declaration after the Fall that **all humanity would be divided into seed of the serpent (the line of unbelief and opposition to God) and the seed of the woman (the line of belief and friendship with God)**. And this then becomes a background theme for every event in the Old Testament. It is there with Cain and Abel, everyone else and Noah, Abraham and his enemies, Jacob and Esau, Egypt and Israel, the Canaanites and Israel, the Philistines and Israel, the Babylonians and Israel, Hamaan and Esther, and ultimately, Herod, the Pharisees, Pontius Pilate and Jesus Christ. But to fully understand those accounts and all the others, you must understand the two lines of enmity that came about as a result of the Fall.
      3. Another of these themes is **the first Adam and the last Adam**. The first Adam plunged us all into sin and death. But Jesus, as the last Adam, obeyed God perfectly and offered Himself as the perfect sacrifice. And so, through faith in Jesus, we inherit His perfect obedience and eternal life. And these are realities that are carefully explored in Romans 5 and 1 Corinthians 15. But they only make sense if you take the account of Adam as historically and literally true.
      4. And when we looked at God’s **covenant** with Noah in chapter 9, we saw that it is a further unfolding of the Covenant of Grace that God established with Adam in Genesis 3. But there will be more unfolding of that covenant when God makes covenant with Abraham, and then Moses and Israel, and then David, and finally in the New Covenant. And so, when Jesus comes and says, “*This is my blood of the covenant*,” well, you better understand the Old Testament covenants! And when you are reading the Old Testament, you must consider what stage of covenant development the passage you are reading is in.
      5. Another grand theme we have noted in our sermon series is **temple**. When Jesus was on earth, He described Himself as the temple. So, again, you better understand that the Garden of Eden was the first temple, as an earthly copy of heaven. And later the people of Israel built a tabernacle and temple. And the church and individual believers are described as a temple. And the ultimate temple is the new heavens and new earth where we will live forever with Jesus and each other. Thus, where you are in the Bible in relation to the development of temple theology is really important for understanding your passage, and understanding Jesus.
         1. And as subsections of this theme, from the Book of Hebrews, we learn that all the Old Testament **ceremonies and sacrifices and feasts** all had their fulfilment in the Lord Jesus Christ. And the study of the ceremonies and sacrifices and feasts in order to see how they point to Christ and His work is incredibly instructional and devotional, as we saw with our Leviticus sermon series!
         2. And then there is **Promised Land** theology. The temple was at the centre of Israel’s life in the Promised Land. That is where they lived in relationship with God as His special people. Well, the church is our Promised Land today. But Promised Land theology also points forward to life in the new heavens and new earth with the Lord Jesus and all God’s chosen people.
      6. And one more key theme of the history of redemption is **prophets, priests, and kings**. And that is because each prophet, priest, or king of the Old Testament points forward to, sometimes negatively and sometimes positively, He who is the perfect prophet, priest, and king – Jesus Christ. But you must understand where the prophet or priest or king you are reading about is in the history of redemption to fully see how he points us to Christ.
   4. So, those are just some of the history of redemption themes that help us read and understand and benefit from the Old Testament. And let me finish this point with some quick application thoughts:
      1. **2 Corinthians 1:20** tells us that “*All the promises of God find their Yes in [Jesus].*” And this declaration is meant as a comfort for believers. But it begs a question, doesn’t it: What has God promised? And the answer is found in the promises in the history of redemption, which offer life, preservation, a promised land, a chosen and glorious people, a righteous priest, a ruling king, a trustworthy prophet, and an atoning lamb. And so, to paraphrase Paul: We know that all the promises about Jesus that were made in Old Testament times have been fulfilled. Therefore, we may be certain that their complete fulfilment, as well as every New Testament promise about Jesus and the fulness of salvation, will also be kept. So, you may trust in the God of the promises! That is one blessing and benefit of the history of redemption.
      2. And I trust you can also now see why vicariate examination sermons, and every sermon that you hear, should take into account the historical redemptive context. We recently had our annual church visit. And one of the questions we were asked is: **Does the minister preach from both the Old and New Testaments**. And what we have said about the history of redemption lies behind that question. We don’t want to fall into the trap of seeing the Old Testament as irrelevant for believers today.
      3. And finally here, this has implications also for our **Sunday school material and Bible study material**. For there is plenty of moralistic Sunday School and Bible study material out there. It is much harder to find material that takes the history of redemption into account. But it is so worth the effort!
2. Well, with all that in view, **let’s look at these two genealogies** and try and take into account the context, including the historical redemptive context. And we can be brief here because of what we have learned in recent sermons, and because of what we learned in the first point.
   1. We have already seen that a major theme in Genesis is **the line of promise**. After the Fall, God revealed the two lines in humanity – the seed of the serpent, or the line of unbelief and opposition to God, and the seed of the woman, the line of promise and faith and Messiah. Well, that is what this part of Genesis is about.
      1. I never got too much into the game of **chess**, but I played it enough to know that chess is all about strategy, isn’t it. You must plan many moves ahead to have all the pieces ready for the checkmate move. Well, the Tower of Babel was one more ‘chess move’ of God, designed to bring about the people and nation of Israel. It resulted in the separation of the nations. And Genesis 10 is the list of all the clans and nations and languages. And we see that the descendants of Shem occupied the territory of what we call the Middle and far east. But they would be surrounded by the nations that descended from Ham.
      2. And we saw last week that this separation was in order to bring about the circumstances in which God could have a separate, distinct people, who lived in a special place and in a special way. Well, Genesis 12 is God’s next ‘chess move’ as He calls Abram. But these two genealogies reveal that the line of Shem and then, within that, the line of Terah, is the line of promise. From them will come Abram and God’s people, and, eventually, the promised Messiah.
      3. And if you go and look at the genealogy of Jesus in Luke 3, you will find all these names repeated.
   2. So, two points of application as we draw to a close:
      1. The first has to do with the **historical accuracy and trustworthiness of the Bible**.
         1. If you compare the genealogy of Shem with the genealogy of the Lord Jesus in Luke 3, you will see a name in the genealogy of Jesus that does not appear in the genealogy of Shem. In the genealogy of Shem, it is Shem, then Arpachshad, then Shelah. But in Luke 3, it mentions **Cainan** between Arpachshad and Shelah.
         2. Another matter is **when Terah fathered Abram**. Verse 26 says that Terah fathered Abram, Nahor, and Haran when he was 70 years old. But we know from chapter 12 and Acts 7 that Abram must have been born when Terah was 130 years old.
         3. So, taking these two things together, many commentators say, See! There are mistakes in the Bible. It is just a man-made document. But others use the ‘extra’ name to argue that we can’t use these genealogies to work out dates – many names may have been left out, they argue, which could add centuries or millennia or even millions of years to human history.
         4. Well, with regard to when Terah fathered Abram, **the order of the names of sons is about biblical importance, not oldest to youngest**. We see the same with Shem, Ham, and Japheth. Shem is first because of his biblical importance, not because he was the oldest; Japheth was the oldest son, which is why his line is listed first in chapter 10. And Haran was the oldest of Terah’s sons, which is why he is referred to first in verse 28. So, there is no discrepancy here. Terah first became a father to Haran when he was 70 years old, and he had Abram, 60 years later, when he was 130.
         5. And with regards to the extra name in the genealogy of Jesus, the best explanation for it that I have read is that the Cainan in Luke 3:36 is what we call **a copyist’s error**. For in the very next verse of Luke’s genealogy, there is another son of Cainan. So, two sons of Cainan in two verses. The one closest to Adam is the Kenan or Cainan in the genealogy of Genesis 5. So, most probably, at some stage, as someone was producing a copy of the Bible, they accidentally included an extra Cainan, which, if you have ever tried to copy a document by hand, is so easy to do. And then, other copyists copied his extra Cainan, and it soon became part of Luke’s genealogy in every Bible.
            1. And just in case me admitting to an ‘error’ of this sort shocks you, it shouldn’t. In our confessions we recognize that it is the original documents that Moses and Samuel and David and Matthew and Paul wrote that are perfect and without error. And God has also overseen the copying of the Bible books such that we have the Word of God. But we freely acknowledge the possibility of things like small copying errors that do not take away from or add to any essential element of the Christian faith.
            2. But if you want a more detailed explanation, Jonathan Sarfati’s commentary on Genesis has a really thorough and helpful explanation.
         6. The key point though is that your Bibles are historically accurate and trustworthy and reliable!
      2. But the second point of application, which is our concluding point, is **God’s amazing grace**. And this is the perfect way to finish our Genesis series!
         1. We have spoken about these two genealogies being the line of promise. And that means that from them will come the nation of Israel and ultimately the Lord Jesus Christ. Well, **what are we told about Abram’s wife in verse 30**? She was not able to have children. And so, humanly speaking, Abram and Sarai were no use to God in terms of their ability to have children.
         2. But we also read earlier in **Joshua 24** that Terah and his family, which included Abram, “*served other gods*.” Oh! So, before the call of God in chapter 12, Abram worshipped other gods.
         3. What does all this teach us about God and salvation then? It teaches us that He loves His people not because they are lovely but because He has set His love upon them. In the same way that Noah was righteous and blameless *as a result of* God setting His electing love upon Him before the foundation of the world, so also Abram became the father of the righteous as a result of God setting His electing love upon Him before the foundation of the world. Abram was *not* a good man before chapter 12. He was a sinner who worshipped idols. And neither was he powerful or important or able to deliver children that God could use.
         4. But the God of the Bible is a God of saving love. According to Ephesians 1:4, “*[God] chose [Abram] in [Christ] before the foundation of the world, that [he] should be holy and blameless before Him. In love [God] predestined [him] for adoption through Jesus Christ, according to the purpose of His will*.” And as for Sarai, **Psalm 113:9** says that God “*gives the barren woman a home, making her the joyous mother of children. Praise the LORD!*” And He did exactly this for Sarai, making her the mother of Isaac and a forbear of the Lord Jesus Christ.

And this is the God that Genesis wants us to see and know and love. He is a God who “*is merciful and gracious, slow to anger and abounding in steadfast love*.” He “*does not deal with us according to our sins, nor repay us according to our iniquities*.” In fact, “*the steadfast love of the LORD is from everlasting to everlasting on those who”* trust in Jesus Christ alone for their salvation*.* This, brothers and sisters, is the gospel of Jesus Christ in the Book of Genesis. This is the incredible story of salvation that tbegins here! Is this God your God? Have you repented of your sins and trusted in Jesus Christ as your Saviour and Lord? That is the call of Genesis. All glory be to our glorious and good God. Amen.

Let us sing Psalm 103 as our song of response.