

Who was Shem in the Bible?

Shem was one of the three sons of Noah. Before the great flood that God used to judge the inhabitants of the earth for their great wickedness (Genesis 6:5-7), God instructed the righteous Noah to build a great ark to save Noah and his wife, along with their sons, Shem, Ham, and Japheth, and their wives. The Lord brought two of every kind of unclean animal and seven of every kind of clean animal and shut them up in the ark before the flood waters covered the earth (Genesis 7:14-16). The families and animals were in the ark for about 370 days: 40 days and 40 nights during the rains, and then the remainder of the time waiting for the flood waters to recede (see Genesis 7:1-8:19).

Shem is always mentioned first among the sons of Noah, possibly because he was of primary importance to Moses' audience, the Hebrews. Shem was their ancestor. In the birth order of Noah's sons, Shem was the middle child, as calculated below:

- according to Genesis 5:32, Noah began having children when he was 500 years old.
- according to Genesis 7:11, Noah was 600 years old when the flood began (making his oldest child 100 years old)
- according to Genesis 11:10, Shem had a child when he was 100 years old, two years after the flood (making him 98 years old at the time of the flood)
- since we know that Ham was not the oldest (according to Genesis 9:24), the 100-year-old son at the time of the flood must have been Japheth

Shem, along with his brothers and their wives, fulfilled God's command to begin repopulating the earth (Genesis 9:7). Shem's line produced the Assyrians, Chaldeans, Elamites, Arameans, Moabites, Ammonites, Edomites, Arabs, and Hebrews. Shem's name is the origin of the word Semitic; Shem's great-grandson Eber was the father of those who

were eventually called “Hebrews,” including Abram and the Jews (see Genesis 10 and 11 for more on Shem’s line).

There is only one other story that deals with Shem, son of Noah. After the flood, Noah became something of a farmer and grew a vineyard (Genesis 9:20). He became drunk on the wine one day and passed out naked in his tent (verse 21). Noah’s son Ham found him thus, but instead of covering his father or helping him in any way, he reported the incident to his brothers outside (verse 22). Shem and Japheth brought some sort of garment into the tent, and, walking backward so they would not see their father’s nakedness, they covered Noah with the garment (verse 23). When Noah woke, he was angry with Ham for his neglect and cursed him, but he blessed both Shem and Japheth for the respect they showed (verses 24-27).

After Shem had fathered many children, he passed away at the old age of 600 (Genesis 11:10-11). Shem is mentioned in the New Testament as an ancestor of Jesus (Luke 3:36).