

Genesis 9:18-10:32 – The Descendants of Noah

Review

Last time, we discussed the Great Flood and God’s preservation of the ark and its occupants through the catastrophe. After the flood, God established His covenant with mankind symbolized by the rainbow in which God commanded mankind to go forth and multiply on the earth and promised to give mankind dominion over the earth. As part of this covenant, God also promised never again to destroy all life by the waters of a flood.

ASIDE – Although I failed to mention it when we discussed the passage, Genesis 6:9 is the first mention of righteousness in God’s Word – saying that *Noah was a righteous man, blameless in his generation*. Of course, we thoroughly examined the concept that Noah – being a human being born after the fall of man in the Garden – had no righteousness of his own, but God credited Noah’s obedience in faith as righteousness.

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¹⁸The sons of Noah who went forth from the ark were Shem, Ham, and Japheth. (Ham was the father of Canaan.) ¹⁹These three were the sons of Noah, and from these the people of the whole earth were dispersed. Genesis 9:18-19 (ESV)

We have seen that God preserved Noah and his family through the flood by His divine sovereignty. Furthermore, we have seen that God’s preservation of Noah – and more specifically of Noah’s son Shem – through the flood was necessary to the fulfillment of God’s plan of salvation out of death for all mankind through Jesus – God the Son, who would eventually be born in the human flesh of Shem’s descendant – Jesus of Nazareth.

The latter part of Genesis 9 and the entirety of Genesis 10 are devoted to detailing the genealogies of Noah’s three sons – the so-called “Table of the Nations.” A similar genealogy is found in 1 Chronicles 1:5-27. These genealogies are virtually identical, so we won’t bother to compare them, and we’ll focus on the genealogy found in Genesis 10. But first we encounter the unpleasant story of the curse Noah pronounced upon his own grandson Canaan due to a mistake made by Canaan’s father Ham.

The Curse of Canaan

²⁰Noah began to be a man of the soil, and he planted a vineyard. ²¹He drank of the wine and became drunk and lay uncovered in his tent. ²²And Ham, the father of Canaan, saw the nakedness of his father and told his two brothers outside. ²³Then Shem and Japheth took a garment, laid it on both their shoulders, and walked backward and covered the nakedness of their father. Their faces were turned backward, and they did not see their father’s nakedness. Genesis 9:20-23 (ESV)

To the modern western “liberated” mind, the idea of Ham looking upon his father’s nakedness (or indeed anyone’s nakedness) doesn’t seem like a big deal. Indeed, Noah’s own drunkenness might seem more of an offense. Recall that prior to eating of the tree of the knowledge of good and evil,

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Adam and Eve were naked and unashamed. So, what is the lesson God is trying to teach us through this sordid little story?

I don't think it's so much about Ham looking upon Noah's nakedness, nor even about Noah's own culpability for having been naked and drunk in the first place. The lesson is more about Ham's disrespect of his father. We can imagine that when Ham told his brothers about Noah's shameful state, he did so scornfully, thus incurring Noah's ire. By contrast, Shem and Japheth showed respect for their father in covering his nakedness without looking, even though Noah didn't perhaps deserve such respect. Shem and Japheth showed respect for their father despite his failings simply because he was their father. Ham disrespected his father due to his actions. Shem and Japheth respected Noah's position as their father **despite** his actions.

Later, when God encoded His commandment for children to respect their parents (Exodus 20:12), He didn't make any explanation about **why** we need to respect our parents. He simply commanded it. Jesus Himself modeled this for us at the wedding in Cana where He honored His mother's request by turning water into wine even though His time to reveal Himself as Israel's מָשִׁיחַ **māšīaḥ** had not yet come.

24When Noah awoke from his wine and knew what his youngest son had done to him, 25he said,

***“Cursed be Canaan;
a servant of servants shall he be to his brothers.”***

26He also said,

***“Blessed be the LORD, the God of Shem;
and let Canaan be his servant.***

***27May God enlarge Japheth,
and let him dwell in the tents of Shem,
and let Canaan be his servant.”*** Genesis 9:24-27 (ESV)

I find several things about this passage disturbing. First, I wonder how Noah became aware of what had happened while he was passed out drunk in his tent. Either he wasn't altogether unaware of events as they took place (and therefore might have been able to cover his nakedness himself), or Ham's elder brothers tattled on him after their father sobered up. Second, this Noah whom God had said was “**righteous before me**” was apparently unwilling or unable to recognize his own culpability in this whole sordid affair. The stern warning of John the apostle springs to my mind...

8If we say we have no sin, we deceive ourselves, and the truth is not in us.

9If we confess our sins, he is faithful and just to forgive us our sins and to cleanse us from all unrighteousness. 10If we say we have not sinned, we make him a liar, and his word is not in us. 1 John 1:8-10 (ESV)

Even more disconcerting is the idea that Noah cursed Canaan, his grandson rather than Canaan's father Ham who had committed the offense at which Noah was so upset. Why? It is certainly possible that Canaan took part in ridiculing his grandfather along with his father Ham. More likely though, Noah's curse pointed to a time which was then in the distant future.

When we examine the genealogies of Noah's three sons, we will discover that Canaan's descendants settled along the eastern Mediterranean coast and became the great enemies of God's chosen people

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the Israelites when they returned from Egypt to conquer the promised land at God's command hundreds of years later. That warfare between the Israelites and the Canaanites has never really ended, although there have been periods of uneasy peace between these peoples over the subsequent millennia. Indeed, Israel is currently embroiled in vicious combat with the descendants of the Canaanites in Gaza after decades of intermittent terrorist attacks originated from Gaza and the other Palestinian controlled territories upon the Israeli population.

The ancient Canaanites practiced many forms of idolatry which included sexual perversions and even child sacrifice. Therefore, when the Israelites returned to conquer the land under Joshua, God commanded them to destroy the entire Canaanite population including its animals. Thus, in pronouncing this curse upon Canaan, Noah was perhaps unknowingly prophetic.

Before we move on, we need to address a historical false teaching about Noah's curse upon Canaan that has happily now largely fallen out of fashion. For many years, preaching from ostensibly "christian" pulpits particularly in the United States used this curse upon Canaan as "biblical" justification for doctrines of racial discrimination based on skin color. This passage in Genesis 9 was used to justify enslavement and oppression of black Africans, and their American descendants in the Name of God. Not only was such preaching wicked in its principles, but it was also thoroughly erroneous in its premise. In fact, the Canaanites are a semitic people, not black Africans. Perhaps worst of all, some people who recognized the error and abject wickedness of this teaching rejected the Gospel of Jesus Christ itself, which of course teaches nothing of the sort. In this, those who promulgated this evil teaching from their pulpits bear at least partial culpability for the eternal condemnation of those who rejected the Truth because of their lies! Thus, Jesus' brother James warned...

¹Not many of you should become teachers, my brothers, for you know that we who teach will be judged with greater strictness. James 3:1 (ESV)

The Descendants of Japheth

¹These are the generations of the sons of Noah, Shem, Ham, and Japheth. Sons were born to them after the flood.

²The sons of Japheth: Gomer, Magog, Madai, Javan, Tubal, Meshech, and Tiras. ³The sons of Gomer: Ashkenaz, Riphath, and Togarmah. ⁴The sons of Javan: Elishah, Tarshish, Kittim, and Dodanim. ⁵From these the coastland peoples spread in their lands, each with his own language, by their clans, in their nations. Genesis 10:1-5 (ESV)

Genesis 10 has been called the "Table of Nations" because it lists the names of the peoples descended from Noah through his three sons after the flood. Refer to the Descendants of Noah and Genesis 10 Maps handouts. The meanings of the names found in Genesis 10 are shown in *italics* on the Descendants of Noah handout. These meanings were gleaned from the interlinear references found at <https://www.blueletterbible.org>.

A quick look at the two maps in the Genesis 10 Maps handout reveals that the locations of the homelands for the various people groups are not entirely agreed upon by scholars. In particular, the location of Tarshish is unknown and has been the subject of considerable debate. Some scholars have even suggested locations in northern Europe or Great Britain for Tarshish. Others maintain that

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Tarshish lay to the south somewhere near the openings of the Red Sea or Arabian Gulf into the Indian Ocean. Therefore, we should take the locations shown on these maps judiciously in most cases, considering them as only possibilities rather than established certainties.

The same applies to the name meanings in some cases. Wherever the name of a descendant ends in “im,” the name refers to a group of people rather than an individual – “im” being the Hebrew suffix for plural nouns and proper names. Remember also that proper names of people and places are often reused in God’s Word. For example, Havilah is listed here in Genesis 10 as a son of Joktan and as a son of Cush, and Sheba is listed as a son of Raamah and as a son of Joktan.

Look at the second page of the Descendants of Noah handout. Although Japheth’s descendants are listed first in Genesis 10, he was Noah’s second-born son. Japheth’s name means “opened.” As you can see from the Genesis 10 Maps handout, Japheth’s descendants settled in Asia Minor (modern Turkey), southern Europe, the eastern Mediterranean basin, and the steppes of Asia for the most part.

Before we move on, notice in Genesis 10:5 we read that the coastland peoples each had their own language. Yet Genesis 11:1 says that, “*...the whole earth had one language and the same words.*” God found that the people building the tower of Babel all had one language, and so He confused their languages to prevent the completion of the tower. This apparent inconsistency is a reminder that ancient Hebrew narratives are not strictly tied to a chronological sequence of events. Just as we found the creation of mankind on the sixth day of creation in Genesis 1, and then found a more detailed reiteration of mankind’s creation in Genesis 2, so we find the story of the tower of Babel and God’s confusion of the languages after the listing of the Table of Nations in the previous chapter.

The Descendants of Ham

*⁶The sons of Ham: Cush, Egypt [מִצְרַיִם *miṣrayim*], Put, and Canaan. ⁷The sons of Cush: Seba, Havilah, Sabtah, Raamah, and Sabteca. The sons of Raamah: Sheba and Dedan.* Genesis 10:6-7 (ESV)

Look at the Genesis 10 Maps handout and page 3 of the Descendants of Noah handout. Ham had four sons mentioned in Genesis 10. He likely had other children that aren’t mentioned in the genealogies of God’s Word. Notice that the descendants of Put aren’t mentioned either. The maps show that Ham’s descendants dispersed widely across northern Africa, the Levant, and the Arabian Peninsula – particularly along the coasts and in Mesopotamia (the plain of Shinar). Two of the names on this list – Havilah and Sheba – are also listed as Shem’s great, great, great grandsons.

⁸Cush fathered Nimrod; he was the first on earth to be a mighty man. ⁹He was a mighty hunter before the LORD. Therefore it is said, “Like Nimrod a mighty hunter before the LORD.” ¹⁰The beginning of his kingdom was Babel, Erech, Accad, and Calneh, in the land of Shinar. ¹¹From that land he went into Assyria and built Nineveh, Rehoboth-Ir, Calah, and ¹²Resen between Nineveh and Calah; that is the great city. Genesis 10:8-12 (ESV)

Nimrod is an intriguing character. The ESV says he was “*...the first on earth to be a mighty man.*” Exactly what that means is subject to debate. Furthermore, many other English translations do not emphasize that Nimrod was the first on earth – just that he began to be a mighty man. Clearly

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Nimrod was a great leader – perhaps the first on earth. Most of the cities that Nimrod built are shown on the inset to the first of the Genesis 10 maps. All of them were located in Mesopotamia – the land between the rivers Tigris and Euphrates – in what is now Iraq. The lower reaches of these two great rivers surround the Plan of Shinar where the tower of Babel was and later the city of Babylon. Although they are not mentioned in Genesis 10, the cities of Ur where Abram was born, Susa where Esther was queen of Persia (modern Iran), and Haran from which God called Abram to go to Canaan are also shown on this map.

¹³*Egypt* [מִצְרַיִם *miṣrayim*] *fathered Ludim, Anamim, Lehabim, Naphtuhim, Pathrusim, Casluhim (from whom the Philistines came), and Caphtorim.*

Genesis 10:13-14 (ESV)

Most English language Bibles transliterate the Hebrew מִצְרַיִם *miṣrayim* as Mizraim rather than translating it with the English name Egypt. The descendants of this son of Ham settled mostly along the Nile and the northeastern coastline of Africa with the notable exception of the Casluhim who were the progenitors of the Philistines and the forefathers of the modern Palestinians of Gaza and the eastern Mediterranean coast.

¹⁵*Canaan fathered Sidon his firstborn and Heth, and the Jebusites, the Amorites, the Girgashites, the Hivites, the Arkites, the Sinites, the Arvadites, the Zemarites, and the Hamathites. Afterward the clans of the Canaanites dispersed. And the territory of the Canaanites extended from Sidon in the direction of Gerar as far as Gaza, and in the direction of Sodom, Gomorrah, Admah, and Zeboiim, as far as Lasha. These are the sons of Ham, by their clans, their languages, their lands, and their nations.* Genesis 10:15-20 (ESV)

Ham's son Canaan became the progenitor of the ...uh... Canaanites. Notable on this list is Sidon. Jesus visited the homeland of Sidon's descendants in southern Lebanon during His ministry – casting a demon out from the daughter of a Canaanite woman. That story of great faith is worthy of a short detour.

²¹*And Jesus went away from there and withdrew to the district of Tyre and Sidon. And behold, a Canaanite woman from that region came out and was crying, "Have mercy on me, O Lord, Son of David; my daughter is severely oppressed by a demon."* ²³*But he did not answer her a word. And his disciples came and begged him, saying, "Send her away, for she is crying out after us."* ²⁴*He answered, "I was sent only to the lost sheep of the house of Israel."* ²⁵*But she came and knelt before him, saying, "Lord, help me."* ²⁶*And he answered, "It is not right to take the children's bread and throw it to the dogs."* ²⁷*She said, "Yes, Lord, yet even the dogs eat the crumbs that fall from their masters' table."* ²⁸*Then Jesus answered her, "O woman, great is your faith! Be it done for you as you desire." And her daughter was healed instantly.* Matthew 15:21-28 (ESV)

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The Jebusites became the residents of the city of Jebus – later called Salem, and now called Jerusalem. God’s Word contains many stories involving the various “-ites” descended from Canaan whose homelands God gave to Abram and his descendants the Israelites. The conflict between the Canaanites and the Israelites over the land continues even until today.

The Descendants of Shem

Shem was the firstborn of Noah’s three sons who survived the flood. Shem was the most important son of Noah, because it was through the line of Shem that Jesus – God the Son – was born into the flesh of the man Jesus of Nazareth for the salvation of all mankind out of death in our sins. The Descendants of Noah handout shows the first few generations of this line listed in the Genesis 10 Table of Nations along with some of Shem’s other descendants.

²¹To Shem also, the father of all the children of Eber [עֵבֶר, eber], the elder brother of Japheth, children were born. Genesis 10:21 (ESV)

The phrasing of this verse is a little confusing. Perhaps it might better read, “Children were also born to Shem, the elder brother of Japheth and father of all the children of Eber.” The reason that Eber is given special mention is that the nation of Israel and Jesus the promised **מָשִׁיחַ *māšīaḥ*** were the descendants of Eber. We derive our word “Hebrew” from the name **עֵבֶר *‘ēber*** (sometimes written in English as Heber). As can be seen from the maps, Shem’s descendants settled throughout the Arabian Peninsula and in Mesopotamia. In particular, Shem’s descendant Terah – the father of Abram – settled in Ur of the Chaldeans near the modern city of Nasiriyah, Iraq just north of the confluence of the Tigris and Euphrates rivers.

²²The sons of Shem: Elam, Asshur, Arpachshad, Lud, and Aram. ²³The sons of Aram: Uz, Hul, Gether, and Mash. Genesis 10:22-23 (ESV)

These sons and grandsons of Shem are listed on the first page of the Descendants of Noah handout. Of these, Arpachshad is Shem’s most noteworthy son through whom the line of Jesus passes. Asshur became the forefather of the Assyrians.

²⁴Arpachshad fathered Shelah; and Shelah fathered Eber. ²⁵To Eber were born two sons: the name of the one was Peleg, for in his days the earth was divided, and his brother’s name was Joktan. Genesis 10:24-25(ESV)

Peleg’s name means “division,” but what was the division of the earth spoken of in Genesis 10:25 for which Peleg was named? Some have postulated that this was a physical breakup of the ancient continent scientists have named Pangea into the continents we know today. More likely though, this verse refers to the dispersion of human society into smaller groups who established various nations after God confused the single language of the people building the Tower of Babel. Some extra-biblical ancient writings confirm this idea, giving us dates for the building of the tower that correspond closely

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to the probable time of Peleg's birth. Answers in Genesis has an excellent article on the subject that can be found at <https://answersingenesis.org/bible-history/in-the-days-of-peleg/>.

²⁶Joktan fathered Almodad, Sheleph, Hazarmaveth, Jerah, ²⁷Hadoram, Uzal, Diklah, ²⁸Obal, Abimael, Sheba, ²⁹Ophir, Havilah, and Jobab; all these were the sons of Joktan. ³⁰The territory in which they lived extended from Mesha in the direction of Sephar to the hill country of the east. ³¹These are the sons of Shem, by their clans, their languages, their lands, and their nations. Genesis 10:26-31 (ESV)

Joktan's name means "smallness," but what he lacked in physical size he certainly made up for in energy. Thirteen sons are listed here. Who knows how many daughters or unlisted sons Joktan had? There's nothing particularly noteworthy about these sons of Joktan apart from the fact that two of the names we find here – Havilah and Sheba are listed also as descendants of Ham. Recall that the land of Havilah was mentioned in Genesis 2:11 as the place prior to the great flood where good gold could be found around which the river Pishon flowed from Eden. Interestingly, although original location of Eden and the River Pishon have been unknown since the flood, Moses wrote about the gold that is to be found in Havilah using the present tense.

Note also that Sheba's name can mean "seven" or "an oath." Later in our study of Genesis we will learn that Abraham made a covenant with the Canaanite leader Abimelech at a well in the Negev (Genesis 21). This covenant was formalized with a gift of seven ewe lambs from Abraham to Abimelech. Because of this covenant oath symbolized by seven ewe lambs, the well was named Beersheba.

We have to wonder what Joktan and his wife were thinking when they named one of their sons "village of death." Of course, we know that the descendants of Joktan's son Jobab eventually settled in the mountains of Kentucky along with the descendants of Billy Bob... nyuk, nyuk, nyuk.

Mesha was a place somewhere along the eastern shore of the Dead Sea named for the Moabite king Mesha who reigned in Moab in the 9th century BC. But the location of Sephar toward which the lands of Joktan's descendants extended as far as "***the hill country of the east***" is unknown.

³²These are the clans of the sons of Noah, according to their genealogies, in their nations, and from these the nations spread abroad on the earth after the flood. Genesis 10:32 (ESV)

Looking Ahead

Next time, God willing, we'll take up the famous story of the Tower of Babel, and then take a closer look at the line of Shem down to Abram (later Abraham).