



BEGINNINGS

A Study of the Book of Genesis

Sanctuary Bible Studies – Woodbury Lutheran Church

Session 8, "The Beginning of Nations" (Genesis 10-11)

1. THE TABLE OF NATIONS (Genesis, Chapter 10)

- On disembarking the ark, God had told Noah's sons, Shem, Ham, and Japheth, "Be fruitful and increase in number and fill the earth" (Gen 9:1). Often referred to as the Table of Nations, Chapter 10 shows how they fulfilled God's command and how from these three sons 70 nations came to be "spread out over the earth after the flood" (10:32).
- The structure of the Table of Nations follows the offspring of the three sons, Japheth going first because he may have been the oldest. 14 nations come from Japheth, 30 from Ham, and 26 from Shem, for a total of 70 nations, perhaps significant as a complete number (10 X 7). Because of the "70," most students of the Bible do not see the list as complete or even consistent. Japheth's list (vss. 2-4) extends comprehensively to the second generation and selectively to the third. Of Ham's four sons listed (vss. 6-20), three are traced to the third generation (Put is not), and one of Cush's sons is traced to the fourth. Of Shem's five descendents listed (vss. 21-32), only two are traced to the third generation, and one, Eber, the father of the Hebrew nation, is traced all the way to the sixth.
- Expansions include the "maritime peoples" reference (10:5); Nimrod (10:8-12); the territorial boundaries of the Canaanites (10:19); and the divided earth at the time of Peleg (vs. 25; "Peleg" means division)
- The descendents of Japheth (vss. 2-4) became the Indo-Europeans who settled north to Europe and west all the way to Spain. They were "maritime peoples" from the perspective of Moses at the time of writing Genesis. *Gomer and Magog* were probably near the Black Sea. *Madai* became the Medes (Persians). *Javan* became Ionia, southern Greece. *Tubal* was in Pontus and *Meshech* was in the Moschian Mts. *Tiras* was probably Thrace of later times. All three names in vs. 3 were probably in the upper Euphrates area. *Tarshish* was a port of Spain. *Elisha* (Alashia) could have been Cyprus with the *Kittim* being those who lived there. The *Rodanim* refers to those who lived on the Greek island of Rhodes.
- The descendents of Ham (vss. 5-21) called southwestern Asia and northeast Africa their home. *Cush* was in north Africa, south of Egypt. *Mizraim* (literally "two Egypts") refers to Upper and Lower Egypt. *Put* may be Punt, Egyptian for modern-day Somalia. *Canaan* later came to be known as Palestine, named after the Philistines. Canaan means "land of purple" because of the purple dye it produced. All seven of the nations in vs. 7 were in Arabia. *Erech* (vs. 10) was in Mesopotamia. The names in vss. 13-14 are mostly in north Africa. "*Caphtorites*" (vs. 14) likely refers to Crete. The names in vss. 15-20 refer to

nations/areas in and around Canaan. The “*Hittites*” dominated much of Canaan for 600 years (1800-1200 BC).

- *Nimrod* in vss. 8-12 is singled out as “a mighty hunter before the LORD,” and even the focus of a proverbial compliment. Nimrod may be the Hebrew name for Sargon I, an early king of Akkad. Nimrod was a city-builder, particularly on the plain of Shinar and in Assyria. The name “Nimrod” means “let us rebel.” Traditionally, Nimrod is seen as one whose empire-building was directly rebellious against God. Jewish tradition says Nimrod was responsible for building the Tower of Babel. Certainly his empire began there (vs. 10) and would move from the judgment of Genesis 11 to the catastrophe of Revelation 18.
- Shem’s descendents (vss. 21-31) settled along the Arabian Sea, the Persian Gulf, the Tigris and the Euphrates, across the Syrian Desert, and of course in modern-day Israel. They were first called Shemites and then Semites. “*Eber*” is the origin of the name “Hebrew.” Vs. 25’s comment on *Peleg* may reflect the division of Chapter 11 or the division into nomads and farmers. *Elamites* lived west of Mesopotamia. *Asshur* = Assyria. *Lud*=Lydians in Asia Minor. *Aram* = Syria. *Sheba* = today’s Yemen. *Ophir* may have been in South Arabia.

2. THE TOWER OF BABEL (11:1-9)

- Vss. 1-4: The issue with the city was not the tower (likely a ziggurat, a staircase structure with a temple atop, built by ancient Mesopotamians-- and central Americans!). The issue was their pride and rebellion against God shown in their motivations:
 - “so that we may make a name for ourselves”
 - “and not be scattered over the face of the whole earth”
- Vss. 5-9: God was concerned that the prideful power of these masses gathering in one place would counter His kingdom and Lordship.
- The name, Babel, actually means “gate to a god” in Akkadian, and sounds like the Hebrew word for confused, *balal*.
- God’s judges their pride by confusing their languages and scattering the nations.
- Note that the day of Pentecost (Acts 2) reverses this event. Then people from all over the world heard the gospel and understood it.

3. FROM SHEM TO ABRAM (11:10-32)

- Vss. 10-26: This genealogy spans 10 generations (like that of Seth). Note that the length of post-flood life has shortened considerably.
- Vs. 31: Ur, Abram’s hometown, was likely in today’s southern Iraq. Excavations here from the 1920’s-30’s reveal a great civilization at this time. “Haran” was a caravan city in the 19th-18th Century B.C.
- We have now been introduced to the nations and the father of the choice nation, Israel, with whom God makes a covenant in Genesis 12.

BEGINNINGS

1. Earthly success can often spell spiritual disaster.
2. God does not wink at presumption (our telling Him when, where, and how He will act).
3. The Gospel is a force that unifies nations and languages.