

Genesis 10: Biblical Reading and Reflections

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[0 : 0 0] Genesis chapter 10. These are the generations of the sons of Noah, Shem, Ham and Japheth. Sons were born to them after the flood. The sons of Japheth, Gomer, Magag, Medi, Javan, Tubal, Meshach and Tyrus. The sons of Gomer, Ashkenaz, Riphath and Togamah.

The sons of Javan, Elisha, Tarshish, Kittim and Dodanim. From these the coastland peoples spread in their lands, each with his own language by their clans in their nations. The sons of Ham, Cush, Egypt, Put and Canaan. The sons of Cush, Seba, Havala, Sabta, Rehama and Sabta, Tika. The sons of Rehama, Sheba and Dedan. Cush fathered Nimrod. He was the first on earth to be a mighty man. He was a mighty hunter before the Lord. Therefore it is said, like Nimrod, a mighty hunter before the Lord. The beginning of his kingdom was Babel, Erech, Akkad and Kalne in the land of Shinar. From that land he went into Assyria and built Nineveh, Rehoboth-ir, Kela, Kela and Resen. Between Nineveh and Kela. That is the great city.

Egypt fathered Ludim, Anamim, Lahabim, Naphtahim, Pathrusim, Kaslahim, from whom the Philistines come, and Kaphtarim. Canaan fathered Sidon, his firstborn in Heth, and the Jebusites and the Amorites, the Girgashites, the Hivites, the Archites, the Sinites, the Arvidites, the Zemurites 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, Gemara, Admar and Zeboim as far as Lasha. These are the sons of Ham by their clans, their languages, their lands and their nations. To Shem also the father of all the children of Eber, the elder brother of Japheth, children were born. The sons of Shem, Elam, Asher,

Arpachshad, Ludd and Aram. The sons of Aram, Az, Hul, Getha and Mash. Arpachshad fathered Shelah, and Shelah fathered Eber. To 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. Joktan fathered Almodad, Shelef, Hazar Maveth, Jerah, Hadaram, Uzal, Dikla, Obel, Abimeel, Sheba, Ophir, Havala and Jobab. All these were the sons of Joktan. The territory in which they lived extended from Mesha in the direction of Sephar to the hill country of the east. These are the sons of Shem by their clans, their languages, their lands and their nations. These 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. Out of Eden flowed a river which divided into four rivers which watered the surrounding lands. Out of Noah flow three lines of descendants Shem, Ham and Japheth and these go into the wider world and eventually are divided up and settle all the different surrounding nations.

The attention given to these nations depends in part upon their proximity to Israel and so the nations with which they had the greatest dealings are given most attention within this chapter.

[4 : 09] But this is the table of the nations. There are 70 nations listed. That number 70 is an important one in scripture. Later on we'll see 70 descendants of Jacob going down into Egypt and on various other occasions in scripture this number occurs. Going through the lists of the names we can maybe notice particular patterns. The first thing to note is the significance of the number seven. Of the sons of Japheth there are seven and then there are seven grandsons as well. Such a list needn't be exhaustive.

Such a list can sometimes exclude certain characters and include others in part to reveal a numerological significance. The sons of Ham are of a particular significance to the author of Genesis. These are nations with which Israel would have more to do. The Egyptians, the Assyrians, the Babylonians. All of these descend from these particular peoples. The emphasis of this text is not so much on a genealogical succession as the spreading out, the multiplication, the division of different peoples within the world.

The world is populated by different families of peoples and as you look through this passage you'll see a certain refrain that occurs. Spreading in their lands with their own language, by their clans, in their nations. In verse 5 you see a similar thing in verse 20. These are the sons of Ham by their clans, their languages, their lands and their nations. And in verse 31 these are the sons of Shem by their clans, their languages, their lands and their nations. And in verse 32 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. This is how the world is populated. And it's a world populated by different families of people. Different families that have a particular character. As we saw already in the connection between Ham and his son Canaan, there is a connection between persons and their genealogy.

People are characterised in part by the persons or groups of persons that they have descended from. Nations have characters. And within Genesis chapter 10 you're reading about some of these different nations and the characters that they have. The figure of Nimrod particularly stands out in this chapter.

He's a mighty hunter before the Lord. He's a kingdom builder, an empire creator. He gets Babel, Akkad, Assyria and Nineveh and all these other places as part of his vast reach of his imperial power.

[6 : 53] And as he's doing this, he's presumably the person who founds the Tower of Babel. He has this great intent to form this vast powerful kingdom that takes many people into itself.

Canaan is described in more detail as well. Not surprisingly these are the people that Israel would have to deal with more closely. The Jebusites, the Amorites, the Girgashites, the Hivites, the Archite, the Sinites, the Arvidites, the Zemurites and the Hamathites.

And all of these different clans are peoples who will be within the land that Israel will have to remove. The territory of the Canaanites is described and again it has that refrain of the way that the sons of Ham have been divided out and that they've been dispersed according to their clans, languages, lands and nations. Shem is introduced to us as the father of all the children of Eber and as the elder brother of Japheth. Japheth presumably comes first because he is the elder brother of Ham and Shem comes last because Shem is the one with whom the rest of the story will really have to do. Shem is the one who is the father of all the children of Eber. Perhaps Eber's name is related to Hebrews.

Hebrews. Eber's sons are also singled out in certain ways. Peleg, we're told the meaning of his name, that the division that his name speaks of is related to the division of the earth during the days of his life. Peleg's brother's name is Joktan and Joktan's descendants are listed in detail here.

The question of why they are given so much attention is a difficult one and I'm not sure I have a good answer for it. It's worth looking into I'm sure. It's another line of the family that will produce on the other side Abraham and his descendants and so maybe that's part of the purpose to reveal some of the significant people groups that arose from that particular line of the family. Distant cousins and relations as it were. One question. As we're reading through this list of names there are a number of points where we recognize certain names associated with particular people groups and at one specific point we're told that the Philistines come from the people of Egypt and that suggests an association between those two groups of people. How might this prove an important piece of information as we read further in scripture?