

Genesis 10:1-32; 11:10-26

Opening the family picture albums

At my mother's home in Florida is a drawer with dozens of pictures in it. The last few times we have been at her house visiting, my oldest daughter has enjoyed looking at the pictures. They are almost exclusively family pictures. Some of the people in the pictures she's obviously met. But most she hasn't. Nonetheless, she's related to all of them.

In these chapters of Genesis we open the family picture album. We're introduced to dozens of folks, none of which we've ever met personally. But in a very real sense, we're related to each of them. Some more closely than others, obviously, but, since we're all descended from Noah, ultimately we're all related somewhere down line.

Notice first then the global dispersion in verses 1-32 of chapter ten. We see listed fourteen families of Japheth, thirty families of Ham, and twenty-six families 26 of Shem. This makes seventy total families. In Scripture, seventy is a number of completeness. There are a significant number of seventies in the Bible. There were seventy members of Jacob's family who went down to Egypt, meaning they went down completely. There were seventy days of mourning for Joseph by Egyptians, meaning there was complete sadness at his death. The Jews experienced seventy years of exile in Babylon, meaning there was complete punishment. And there are many other occurrences of the number seventy through the Scripture.

I believe it's no different here. The use of seventy total families is, I believe, intentional. It speaks to us of the complete dispersion of people upon the earth. Chronologically, the story of Babel in chapter eleven precedes what we read here. At Babel, man tried to prevent a God-ordained dispersal over the globe. But God confused their language causing the dispersal anyway.

We read a lot of names here. Some would say they're just insignificant genealogies. Others (like me) would say nothing in the word is insignificant. The Holy Spirit inspired Moses to give these names for a reason. Often, we can find meaning in the names. It's important to realize here that it is difficult to make a positive identification of all these names and locations. Nonetheless, we can note some things in this ethnological table.

Note first the *juvenile Japhethites* (10:1-5). The smallest amount of space is given to Japheth, Noah's eldest son. He receives only four verses of mention (vv. 2-5). I've called them the juvenile Japhethites because at this point they are relatively insignificant. As their history began, they spread out to become the peoples of Asia-Minor and Europe. And in these early days, they don't seem to play too prominently in world history. But remember the prophecy of Genesis 9:27? Noah prophesied that God would "enlarge Japheth," or as the NIV says, "extend the territory of Japheth." For 2000 years, it looked like this prophecy was false. It was the descendants of Ham and Shem that ruled the world. But in Daniel 5:30-31 we read, "That very night Belshazzar, king of the Babylonians, was slain, and Darius the Mede took over the kingdom, at the age of sixty-two." In the context, Daniel has read the writing on wall for King Belshazzar of Babylon. For the first time in world history, a Japhethite (Darius) comes to world power.

But this event is more than a date mark. Since that time, the world has been dominated by Japhethite rule. Indeed they have been enlarged by God for over 2500 years now.

Most of us are descended from Japheth. The same prophecy that said God would enlarge Japheth also said Japheth would dwell in the tents of Shem. The reference here is to the conversion of the Gentiles. The church was essentially Jewish at its beginning (composed of those descended from Shem). But as the Gentiles came to faith, Japheth was brought into the tent. But Japheth, like anyone else, only enters through faith. Just as many Jews rejected the Messiah, so many Gentiles today reject him as well.

It's interesting to note that many of the Japhethite families listed here by Moses are also identified by Ezekiel with the hostile antisemitic forces of the last days which descend upon Israel. Ezekiel 38-39 mentions Magog, Meschech, Tubal, Gomer, and Togarmah. We learn an important lesson from this. That is that we either choose to believe God's truth or reject it. Faith is NOT hereditary. We're not born into the family of God whether we're a Shemite, a Japhethite, or a Hamite. By a conscious choice you must choose to follow God's plan. That plan is, in short, the death of His only Son upon the cross as atonement for your sin. What choice have you made?

Notice next the **highlighted Hamites** (10:6-20). As history in the new world progressed, it was the descendants of Ham who initially prospered. These were the ones who settled Africa and much of the mid-east. They're also the ones occupying most of the space here; fourteen verses listing thirty families! We see Cush listed as a son of Ham. He is generally identified with Ethiopia. In fact, the KJV of Isaiah 45:14 speaks of the "merchandise of Ethiopia," while the NIV translates this the "merchandise of Cush." Mizraim is another son of Ham, the one who founded Egypt. The Hebrew word for Egypt is Mizraim. The original name for Egypt was Kem, thought by many to be a reference to Ham. The Psalmist said, "Then Israel entered *Egypt*; Jacob lived as an alien in the *land of Ham*. The LORD made his people very fruitful; he made them too numerous for their foes, whose hearts he turned to hate his people, to conspire against his servants. He sent Moses his servant, and Aaron, whom he had chosen. They performed his miraculous signs among them, his wonders *in the land of Ham*" (emphasis mine).

There are numerous other details given to us as the Hamite line is highlighted. Let's note two specific details.

We learn first of **notorious Nimrod** (vv. 8-12). His name is derived from a root word meaning "to rebel." All translations come across with a positive picture. He is described as "a mighty hunter *before* the Lord." The Septuagint, the Greek translation of the Old Testament, however, translates this as "a mighty hunter *against* the Lord." Nimrod seems to have been the primary force in the building of Babel. Everything about him seems to speak of defiance and rebelliousness. Matthew Henry says, "he was a violent invader of his neighbors' rights and properties, and a persecutor of innocent men, carrying all before him, and endeavoring to make all his own by force and violence."

Nimrod really becomes a warning to us today. It seems that some have domination and ambition bred in the bone. Nothing short of being top-dog will satisfy. This certainly seems to be the picture painted of Nimrod. But when our ambition and striving is independent of God and done for self-glory, it's nothing less than idolatry. Nimrod built Babylon, the home of pagan mystery religions. Secular sources seem to indicate his wife was Semiramis, the woman who first introduced idolatry onto the earth. From there he built Ninevah, which was later to become capital of Assyrian empire. But

where are they today? Babylon will arise again at the end time. But just as it fell before, it will fall again at the hand of Almighty God. Any effort in opposition to the plan of God may thrive in the short-term, but ultimately it's doomed to failure. Notorious Nimrod is a staunch reminder of such.

We also learn of the **cursed Canaanites** (vv. 15-19). These descendants of Ham are listed last. We find associated with them names we read throughout Scripture, all those "ites": Jebusite, Amorite, Gergashite, Hivite, et. al. These Canaanite peoples were bitter and persistent enemies of the people of God. They were vile and filthy people, a truth evident in several ways. First of all, remember the account in chapter nine. Ham exposed Noah's nakedness and a curse was put on Canaan. Next, however, notice their proximity to Sodom and Gomorah (v. 19). We know the reputation of those cities! So degenerate was the culture and religion of the Canaanites that God commanded their complete extermination!

This really speaks to us today about the destructiveness of sin. Sin left unchecked will continue to degenerate to the depths of the unimaginable. God brought judgment upon the sin of the Canaanites. He still judges sin today. Either Christ becomes that judgment in your stead, or He'll judge you personally. But either way sin WILL be judged.

There's yet one more group to consider in this global dispersion. Notice the **significant Shemites** (10:21-32). These are the Semitic peoples of the Orient and mid-east. This would include Jews, Orientals, et. al. They are very significant in world history for one particular reason; they produce the line of Jesus! In all, twenty-six families are listed in the line of Shem. We see Uz (a grandson) listed. Uz is famous as the home of Job in the Old Testament.

Notice that the line traces down to the sons of Eber (from whose name we get the term Hebrews). Eber had two sons, Peleg and Joktan. Note verse 25 - the name Peleg means division. His name commemorates the event at Babel. But at this point we don't go any further in his line. Instead we skip over to Joktan. We see his thirteen sons listed, although little, if anything, is known of them other than this. But as noted earlier, the line of Shem is significant because it is the line of the Messiah.

To see this line must now turn our attention to the Godly design of verses 10-26 of chapter eleven. Scripture is clear that God had a plan for salvation "before the foundation of the world." It is equally clear that the plan has always been the same; by grace through faith. Or, as Jesus put it, "unless one is born again, he cannot see the kingdom of God" (John 3:3).

Notice first then the **spiritual heritage**. This is the line of the Messiah listed here. But really it's more than that. Really, it shows us a spiritual heritage of salvation by grace through faith. Here we see evidence of those after the Flood who were "born again." How do I know? Notice the very specific wording (wording we've seen before in chapter five which describes the godly line of Seth). Verse twelve says, "Arpachshad lived." Then verse thirteen says again, "and Arpachshad lived." Verse fourteen says, "Shelah lived." Then verse fifteen says again, "and Shelah lived." And so on throughout. Certainly the two-fold mention of living points us to the reality of the new birth. They were born - but more importantly they were born again! This is not said of any of the Hamites. Nor is it said of any of the Japhethites. It's not even said of the Shemites not in this Messianic line. The real question, however, is can it be said of you?

Notice also though the *supernatural heir*. At this point in Scripture the line traces only to Abram, one later called the friend of God. But you can put this genealogical listing side by side with Luke chapter three. You'll find the exact same names, but Luke continues past Abraham. Luke also goes on well before Shem. In fact, Luke begins with Adam, the first man who ever lived. And Luke shows us that this line ultimately culminates in a supernatural heir. From Adam Luke goes through Noah, to Shem, through all these listed here to Abraham, eventually getting to David, and ultimately making it to Jesus, the culmination of this divine line. He is the one, who by God's design would take upon Himself the sin of the world.

Three times per month, Jermaine Washington and Michelle Stevens get together for what they call a "gratitude lunch." Washington donated a kidney to Stevens. They were work associates who used to have lunch together. One day Michelle wept as she spoke about waiting on a kidney donor list for eleven months. She was being sustained by kidney dialysis, and she suffered chronic fatigue and blackouts. She was plagued by joint pain. Washington couldn't stand the thought of watching his friend die, so he gave her one of his kidneys.

What Stevens couldn't do for herself, another (in this case, Washington) did for her. He gave of himself (his kidney) so she could live. It is indeed fitting that they celebrate with a gratitude lunch!

In a real sense, we needed something far greater than a kidney. We needed new life, a life that can only be provided by God Himself. In Christ, that new life is available. In fact, it's ONLY available in Christ. Stevens could have probably found someone else to donate a kidney; but we have no hope other than Christ!