

# NATIONS DESCENDED FROM NOAH (1)

*A Meditation on Genesis 10:1-32*

Genesis 10 answers the question: How did the human race develop after the flood? While not exhaustive, it is the most detailed record of the development of the nations found anywhere. If you're so inclined, you can read different commentaries that go into great detail describing the origin of many nations and empires. My objective is more modest, I merely want to look briefly at the descendants of each of Noah's three sons, and then consider an application that has to do with how we interact with corrupt nations, such as, say, America.

The outline of the chapter is simple:

Verse 1 gives us the introduction;

Verses 2-5 lists the sons of Japheth and their descendants;

Verses 6-20 lists the sons of Ham and their descendants;

Verses 21-31 lists the sons of Shem and their descendants;

Verse 32 concludes the chapter by reminding us that all the nations came from the sons of Noah, and then they spread abroad on the earth.

Noah's son Japheth is mentioned first. James M. Boice notes, "The interesting thing about this expansion of the Indo-European peoples, in addition to the accuracy of the names given in Genesis, is that it is a precise fulfillment of the prophecy made concerning Japheth in the preceding chapter. There Noah is cited as saying, 'May God extend the territory of Japheth; may Japheth live in the tents of Shem, and may Canaan be his slave' (Gen. 9:27). This is what happened. God enlarged the territory of Japheth to include the whole of Europe and even parts of Asia. Moreover, if the expansion of the races proceeded as anthropologists and others today believe—from northeastern Russia across the Bering Strait into Alaska and from there down into the North American and South American continents—this family of nations eventually possessed most of this world's territory" (James M. Boice, *Genesis*, p. 406).

Next, Ham's sons are enumerated, but there is a parenthesis in verses 8-12 where special emphasis is placed upon one of his descendants, namely Nimrod, Ham's grandson. "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'" (10:8-9). Three times Nimrod is described by the adjective *mighty*. But is this a negative or a positive reference? All the phrases describing Nimrod could go either way, so how should they be understood? H.C. Leupold gets us started: "The course that our interpretation of these two verses takes will be determined very largely by the meaning of the word 'Nimrod.' For the meaning of the verb form *nimrodh*, without a doubt, is 'let us revolt.' Now the other words employed are, if left by themselves, either good or evil in their connotation, depending on the connection in which they appear. *Gibbor* (i.e. hunter) may mean 'hero' or 'tyrant.' '[Mighty] hunter' (*gibbor tsayidh*) may be a harmless hunter of the fields, or he may be one who hunts men to enslave them. The phrase, 'in the sight of Yahweh,' in itself expresses neither approval nor disapproval. But each of these terms acquires a bad sense in the light of the name 'Nimrod'" (H.C. Leupold, *Genesis*, p. 366). The next time you see a rebellious kid, point him out to your children and say, "Look at that Nimrod."

In addition to the meaning of his name, Nimrod founded the first great kingdom of the world, Babel or Babylon (vs. 10), which means "confusion." We'll consider this a little more in the next chapter when we meditate on the Tower of Babel, but you'll recall that the Tower was erected as an act of blatant defiance against God and His command to be fruitful and multiply, in order to fill the whole earth with His glory. But the people at the Tower of Babel weren't interested in hallowing God's name. In Genesis 11:4 we see them saying, "Come, let us build ourselves a city and a tower with its top in the heavens, and let us make a name for ourselves, lest we be dispersed over the face of the whole earth." Putting this all together, Nimrod's name means rebel and his kingdom rebelled against God, thus these verses should be seen in a negative light.

"One commentator renders this paragraph: 'Cush begat Nimrod; he began to be a mighty despot in the land. He was an arrogant tyrant, defiant before the face of the Lord; wherefore it is said, Even as Nimrod, the mighty despot, haughty before the face of the Lord. And the homeland of his empire was Babel, then Erech, and Accad, and Calneh, in the land of Shinar. From this base he invaded the kingdom of Asshur, and built Nineveh, and Rehoboth-Ir, and Calah, and Resin between Nineveh and Calah. These made up one great city.'"

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# NATIONS DESCENDED FROM NOAH (2)

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Here we have [Babylon] a great city. But it is great, not as Jerusalem is great (as God's city), but great in its defiance of God. This is man's city, the secular city. It is *of* man, *by* man, and *for* man's glory" (Boice, p. 411). Men build empires or corporations that reflect their character. Therefore, if the men are corrupt, their institutions will likewise be corrupt. Nimrod was a rebel, so we should anticipate the rebellion of Babylon. In fact, from now on, all throughout the Bible, Babylon represents a nation opposed to God (Rev. 18:1-3).

In Genesis 10:15, Ham's cursed son, Canaan, is mentioned, along with his descendants. Canaan and many of his descendants were conquered when Joshua led the Israelites into the Promised Land, the land of Canaan, as the LORD had promised Abraham (Gen. 12:6-7; 15:13-16).

Also of interest is verse 19: "And the territory of the Canaanites extended from Sidon to the direction of Gerar as far as Gaza, and in the direction of Sodom, Gomorrah, Admah, and Zeboiim, as far as Lasha." In Deuteronomy 29:23, we have a statement that "the whole land burned out with brimstone and salt, nothing sown and nothing growing, where no plant can sprout, an overthrow like that of Sodom and Gomorrah, Admah, and Zeboiim, which the LORD overthrew in his anger and wrath." Apparently the Canaanite cities of Admah and Zeboiim, were destroyed along with Sodom and Gomorrah when God rained down fire and burning sulfur. One bad seed led to many bad clans and nations, which God severely judged; some were judged sooner, some were judged later—400 years later. Once again we see the impact of our lives on future generations.

Finally, Shem's sons and descendants are listed. "Sons were also born to Shem, *whose older brother was Japheth*; Shem was the ancestor of all the sons of Eber" (Gen. 10:21, NIV). Up to this point, we would have assumed that Shem was the oldest son, since he is always mentioned first among the brothers: "Shem, Ham, and Japheth" (6:10; 7:13; 10:1). So why is he listed first? Most likely because Christ comes through his line (Lk. 3:36). As we said in the last chapter, Shem and Japheth were honorable sons who behaved in a manner consistent with the gospel by covering their father's shame. Moreover, Shem is named first in Genesis 9:23 as well, which *may* indicate that he was the one who initiated this covering.

Genesis 10:21 states that "Shem was the ancestor of all the sons of Eber." Eber is mentioned in verse 24 as well: "Arpachshad fathered Shelah; and Shelah fathered Eber." Eber is Shem's great grandson. In the Hebrew language, Eber and Hebrew are the same. Abraham is from this line, which explains why he is called "the Hebrew" (Gen. 14:13).

"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" (Gen. 10:25). Peleg means *division*, thus this most likely relates to the judgment of God at the Tower of Babel. Genesis 10 sets the stage for the Tower of Babel in the next chapter.

I'd like to conclude with an application by asking, "How hard do you think it would have been to walk with God in Babylon?" I submit that it would have been extremely difficult. I don't want to delve into all the theology of the book of Revelation, but just consider these words that came from a voice from heaven to God's people about leaving Babylon: "Come out of her, my people, lest you take part in her sins, lest you share in her plagues; for her sins are heaped high as heaven, and God has remembered her iniquities" (Rev. 18:4-5). Babylon is an enemy, therefore God's people are called to come out from among her and be separate, lest they partake of her sins and her judgment. As America resembles Babylon more and more, we must realize the magnetic pull that she will have upon us and our children; a magnetic pull to blindly follow her into the very depths of hell.

Commenting on Ephesians 2:1-3, which talks about our three enemies—the world, the flesh and the devil—David Wells writes in *Above all Earthly Powers*, "Satan's captivity is exercised through the instrumentality of sin and that of 'the world.' It therefore becomes a matter of no small moment to be able to discern what in our culture is good, what is simply innocent, and what is neither." J.B. Phillips paraphrased Romans 12:2, "Don't let the world squeeze you into its mold." Studies reveal that the behavior of so-called Christians isn't any different than that of their pagan neighbors. The squeeze has already occurred; it's now time to break free.

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