

Exegetical Notes – Genesis 10:1-32

“The People Cover the Earth”

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(God’s command to Noah when Noah left the ark was to be “fruitful and increase in number and fill the earth (Genesis 9:1, 7). This chapter shows how the descendants of Noah filled the earth. Scholars argue over the names of some places and people in this list. The ancient names may not have been the names which we know and use today. The purpose of the chapter is not so much to provide a detailed historical record of humanity’s spread over the earth after the flood as it is to show that Noah’s descendants covered the earth. Arguing over the names of people and places is “straining at gnats.”)

Verse 1

This is the account of Shem, Ham and Japheth, Noah’s sons, who themselves had sons after the flood.

- The word “account” appears ten times in the book of Genesis. It appears that this word is a literary device used to divide the story into ten significant parts. It is first used in Genesis 2:4. It is then used in Genesis 5:1, 6:9, 10:1, 11:10, 25:12, 25:19, 36:1, 36:2, 37:2.
- This verse lists Noah’s son out of order. Shem is Noah’s second son. Japheth is his oldest son. As the account of the spread of people over the earth is given, the birth order will not be honored. Japheth will be listed first (see verse 2). However, Shem’s is the line through which God will work and is listed last though he is the second born. The rejection of primogeniture, the rights of the first born, is a common thread in the Biblical story. God chooses whom He chooses and works through His choice.

Verses 2-5

² *The sons of Japheth:*

Gomer, Magog, Madai, Javan, Tubal, Meshek and Tiras.

³ *The sons of Gomer:*

Ashkenaz, Riphath and Togarmah.

⁴ The sons of Javan:

Elishah, Tarshish, the Kittites and the Rodanites. ⁵ (From these the maritime peoples spread out into their territories by their clans within their nations, each with its own language.)

- Japheth is Noah's oldest son. He is the son of Noah who is mentioned least in the Biblical story.
- 14 nations grew from his descendants. These nations were descendants from Japheth, but were separated from each other by the places in which they lived. Though they spoke a common language at the beginning, their languages developed distinction, perhaps accents, which set them apart from each other.

Verses 6-20

⁶ The sons of Ham:

Cush, Egypt, Put and Canaan.

⁷ The sons of Cush:

Seba, Havilah, Sabtah, Raamah and Sabteka.

The sons of Raamah:

Sheba and Dedan.

⁸ Cush was the father of Nimrod, who became a mighty warrior on the earth. ⁹ He was a mighty hunter before the LORD; that is why it is said, "Like Nimrod, a mighty hunter before the LORD." ¹⁰ The first centers of his kingdom were Babylon, Uruk, Akkad and Kalneh, in Shinar. ¹¹ From that land he went to Assyria, where he built Nineveh, Rehoboth Ir, Calah ¹² and Resen, which is between Nineveh and Calah—which is the great city.

¹³ Egypt was the father of the Ludites, Anamites, Lehabites, Naphtuhites, ¹⁴ Pathrusites, Kasluhites (from whom the Philistines came) and Caphtorites.

¹⁵ Canaan was the father of Sidon his firstborn, and of the Hittites, ¹⁶ Jebusites, Amorites, Girgashites, ¹⁷ Hivites, Arkites, Sinites, ¹⁸ Arvadites, Zemarites and Hamathites.

Later the Canaanite clans scattered ¹⁹ and the borders of Canaan reached from Sidon toward Gerar as far as Gaza, and then toward Sodom, Gomorrah, Admah and Zeboyim, as far as Lasha.

²⁰ These are the sons of Ham by their clans and languages, in their territories and nations.

- Ham is Noah's youngest son. He was cursed by his father (see Genesis 9:24-25).
- 30 nations grew from Ham's descendants. The nations listed as Ham's descendants were historically enemies of the rest of Noah's descendants. Among them are Sodom, Gomorrah, Admah, and Zeboyim.
- These nations were descendants from Ham, but were separated from each other by the places in which they lived. Though they spoke a common language at the beginning, their languages developed distinction, perhaps accents, which set them apart from each other.

Verses 21-31

²¹ Sons were also born to Shem, whose older brother was Japheth; Shem was the ancestor of all the sons of Eber.

²² The sons of Shem:

Elam, Ashur, Arphaxad, Lud and Aram.

²³ The sons of Aram:

Uz, Hul, Gether and Meshek.

²⁴ Arphaxad was the father of Shelah, and Shelah the father of Eber.

²⁵ Two sons were born to Eber:

One was named Peleg, because in his time the earth was divided; his brother was named Joktan.

²⁶ Joktan was the father of

Almodad, Sheleph, Hazarmaveth, Jerah, ²⁷ Hadoram, Uzal, Diklah, ²⁸ Obal, Abimael, Sheba, ²⁹ Ophir, Havilah and Jobab. All these were sons of Joktan.

³⁰ The region where they lived stretched from Mesha toward Sephar, in the eastern hill country.

³¹ These are the sons of Shem by their clans and languages, in their territories and nations.

- Shem is Noah's second son. While both Japheth, Noah's oldest son, and Shem, Noah's second son, are blessed by their Father (see Genesis 9:26-27), Shem's blessing is greater. Though Japheth's territory will be increased, he will "live in the tents of Shem" (Genesis 9:27). This implies that the older son will live under the authority of his younger brother. This is God's choice as sovereign Lord.
- 26 nations grew from the descendants of Shem. These are the people who were most loyal to God.

- These nations were descendants from Shem, but were separated from each other by the places in which they lived. Though they spoke a common language at the beginning, their languages developed distinction, perhaps accents, which set them apart from each other.

Verse 32

³² *These are the clans of Noah's sons, according to their lines of descent, within their nations. From these the nations spread out over the earth after the flood.*

- 70 nations grew from the descendants of Noah. Symbolically, the number 70 confirms the truth that all people came from Noah. Symbolically, the number 70 means whole or complete. Here, it means that all people, everyone, descended from this one man, Noah.
- After the flood, people spread out over the surface of the earth.

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