

## **Chaos vs. Order**

### **The Table of Nations**

#### **Genesis 10**

#### **Introduction**

Shem, Ham, and Japheth were the three sons of Noah who accompanied him on the ark. Shem, Ham, and Japheth disembarked, with Noah, from the ark in the mountains of Ararat. Over the next 750 years, their descendants spread across the face of the earth. The Tower of Babel incident, which we'll read about in Genesis 11 next week, was a catalyst for their expansion.

Genesis 10 gives us the dividing of the nations. It is sometimes called the Table of Nations. It describes the generations of Noah's three sons, Shem, Ham, and Japheth, along with the nations that came from them and the regions in which they settled. Genesis 10 provides us with some important insights into the history of the human race. It is the most ancient record we possess of the roots of the nations. It bridges the period we call "pre-history" (from Adam to Abraham and the historical times of Abraham and his descendants).

One writer said this chapter "stands absolutely alone in ancient literature, without a remote parallel, even among the Greeks, where we find the closest approach to a distribution of peoples in the genealogical framework. The Table of Nations remains an astonishingly accurate document. (Analytical concordance to the Bible [Eerdmans], p.30.

Chapter 10 contains individual names, places, and many names of tribes and people groups. The chapter also traces individual histories and the development of nations, especially as they relate to Israel at the time of the conquest of Canaan.

It isn't a complete catalog of all nations, but it is a list that helps Israel understand the origins of the people they would encounter during the conquest, especially in light of the blessings and curse of Noah in Chapter 9.

The three sons of Noah were Shem, Ham, and Japheth.

#### **I. The descendants of Japheth.**

Chapter 10, verse 1 begins with a list of Noah's sons.

"Now, this *is* the genealogy of the sons of Noah: Shem, Ham, and Japheth. And sons were born to them after the flood." ([Genesis 10:1 NKJV](#))

This marks another transition in the records that Moses collects to compile the book of Genesis. The rest of Chapter 10 records the sons born to Noah's sons after the flood. God told them to multiply after the flood, and this is proof that they did. Humanity and life went on.

Verse 2 says, "The sons of Japheth *were* Gomer, Magog, Madai, Javan, Tubal, Meshech, and Tiras." ([Genesis 10:2 NKJV](#))

Japheth had seven sons and was the father of the Indo-European peoples, stretching from India to the shores of Western Europe. They are each linked by linguistic similarities that often seem invisible to a layperson but are much more apparent to the linguist.

From Japheth's son Gomer comes the Germanic peoples, from whom came most of the original peoples of Western Europe. These include the original French, Spanish, and Celtic settlers. Magog, Tubal, and Meshech settled in the far northern part of Europe and became the Russian people.

From Japheth's son, Madai came the ancient Medes, who populated what is now Iran and Iraq. The people of India also came from this branch of Japheth's family.

From Japheth's son, Javan, came the ancient Greeks, whose sea-faring ways are described in Genesis 10:5.

Verse 3 lists the sons of Japheth's eldest son, Gomer.

"The sons of Gomer *were* Ashkenaz, Riphath, and Togarmah." ([Genesis 10:3 NKJV](#))

Ashkenaz was the firstborn son of Gomer. The people who settled north of Judea came from Ashkenaz and settled in the Fertile Crescent. From Togarmah, the third son of Gomer came the Armenians.

Verse 4 lists the sons of Javan whose descendants will become the ancient Greeks.

"The sons of Javan *were* Elishah, Tarshish, Kittim, and Dodanim. From these, the coastland *peoples* of the Gentiles were separated into their lands, everyone according to his language, according to their families, into their nations." ([Genesis 10:4-5 NKJV](#))

The names of the sons of Javan also became geographic names from specific land areas. Linguists have no trouble seeing the connection between Kittim and Cyprus, Rodanim and Rhodes, Gomer and Germany, Meshech and Moscow, and Tubal and Tobolsk.

Everyone according to his language, according to their families, into their nations: These divisions of families developed into language, genetic families, and ethnic nations.

## **II. The descendants of Ham**

Verse 6 lists the sons of Ham.

"The sons of Ham *were* Cush, Mizraim, Put, and Canaan." ([Genesis 10:6 NKJV](#))

The descendants of Ham were the ones who populated Africa and the Far East. Cush's family is also divided into two branches. Part of them established Babylon, from which the notable leader, Nimrod, came, and others established themselves in Ethiopia. Mizraim settled in the region we know as Egypt today. Put settled Libya and the region of North Africa we of Egypt. Canaan settled in the land God gave to Israel and its surrounding regions.

Verse 7 lists the sons of Cush.

"The sons of Cush *were* Seba, Havilah, Sabtah, Raamah, and Sabtechah, and the sons of Raamah *were* Sheba and Dedan. Cush begot Nimrod; he began to be a mighty one on the earth. He was a mighty hunter before the LORD; therefore, it is said, "Like Nimrod the mighty hunter before the LORD." And the beginning of his kingdom was Babel, Erech, Accad, and Calneh, in the land of Shinar. From that land, he went to Assyria and built Nineveh, Rehoboth Ir, Calah, and Resen between Nineveh and Calah (that *is* the principal city)." ([Genesis 10:7-12 NKJV](#))

One of the sons of Cush worthy of note is Nimrod. He was an evil yet mighty ruler on the earth. Nimrod ruled over Babel, which was the first organized rebellion of mankind against God. The name Nimrod means, "Let us rebel." "Like Nimrod, the mighty hunter before the LORD" was not meant to be a compliment. Nimrod was openly defiant in the face of God.

One writer says, "This is not talking about Nimrod's ability to hunt wild game. He was not a hunter of animals. He was a hunter of men – a warrior. It was through his ability to fight and kill and rule ruthlessly that his kingdom of the Euphrates valley city states was consolidated." (Boice)

A Jerusalem Targum says: "He was powerful in hunting and in wickedness before the Lord, for he was a hunter of the sons of men, and he said to them, 'Depart from the judgment of the Lord, and adhere to the judgment of Nimrod!' Therefore it is said: 'As Nimrod the strong one, strong in hunting, and in wickedness before the Lord'" (cited in Morris).

One Jewish record says, "The great success that attended all of Nimrod's undertakings produced a sinister effect. Men no longer trusted in God, but rather in their own prowess and ability, an attitude to which Nimrod tried to convert the whole world."

Nimrod acquired power through murder and violence and ruled by tyranny and oppression. He was the first person to establish a kingdom on the face of the earth. Throughout history, kingdoms have been founded in the very same way. Nimrods have arisen in various ages and nations from that time to the present! In every age, God has had to deliver the world from the Nimrods of the earth.

Verse 13 lists the sons of Ham's son Mizraim.

"Mizraim begot Ludim, Anamim, Lehabim, Naphtuhim, Pathrusim, and Casluhim

(from whom came the Philistines and Caphtorim)." ([Genesis 10:13-14 NKJV](#))

Verse 15 lists the sons of Ham's son Canaan.

"Canaan begot Sidon his firstborn, and Heth; the Jebusite, the Amorite, and the Girgashite; the Hivite, the Arkite, and the Sinite; the Arvadite, the Zemarite, and the Hamathite. Afterward, the families of the Canaanites were dispersed. And the border of the Canaanites was from Sidon as you go toward Gerar, as far as Gaza; then as you go toward Sodom, Gomorrah, Admah, and Zeboiim, as far as Lasha." ([Genesis 10:15-19 NKJV](#))

Canaan begot Sidon, and the family of Sidon went north and became the Hittites and Lebanese. It is believed that many of the Asian peoples descended from the Sinites.

Verse 20 concludes that this is how the descendants of Ham spread out on the earth.

"These *were* the sons of Ham, according to their families, according to their languages, in their lands *and* in their nations." ([Genesis 10:20 NKJV](#))

### **III. The Descendants of Shem**

Verse 21 lists the sons of Shem.

"And *children* were born also to Shem, the father of all the children of Eber, the brother of Japheth the elder. The sons of Shem *were* Elam, Asshur, Arphaxad, Lud, and Aram." ([Genesis 10:21-22 NKJV](#))

From Shem comes Elam, who was an ancestor of the Persian people; Asshur, who was the father of the Assyrians; Lud was father to the Lydians who lived for a time in Asia Minor; and Aram was father to the Arameans, who we also know as the Syrians. Arphaxad was the ancestor of Abram and the Hebrews.

Verse 23 lists the sons of Shem's son, Aram.

"The sons of Aram *were* Uz, Hul, Gether, and Mash." ([Genesis 10:23 NKJV](#))

Uz later became a region in Arabia and was named after Aram's son, Uz. According to the book of Job, Job came from the land of Uz.

Verse 24 lists the sons and descendants of Arphaxad.

"Arphaxad begot Salah, and Salah begot Eber. To Eber were born two sons: the name of one *was* Peleg, for in his days, the earth was divided; and his brother's name *was* Joktan. Joktan begot Almodad, Sheleph, Hazarmaveth, Jerah, Hadoram,

Uzal, Diklah, Obal, Abimael, Sheba, Ophir, Havilah, and Jobab. All these *were* the sons of Joktan. And their dwelling place was from Mesha as you go toward Sephar, the mountain of the east."  
(Genesis 10:24-30 NKJV)

Arphaxad's son was Salah, and Salah's son was Eber. Eber had two sons named Peleg and Joktan. It seems at this time that the people of the earth were divided. Half believed in God, and half didn't. The line who believed in God were descendants of Arphaxad, Salah, Eber, and Joktan. The sons of Joktan became the various Arabic people. The one son of Joktan that stands out is Jobab, who many say is the one we know as Job in the Old Testament.

Verse 31 recaps how the families of Shem spread out.

"These *were* the sons of Shem, according to their families, according to their languages, in their lands, according to their nations." (Genesis 10:31 NKJV)

## **Conclusion**

Verse 32 ends the chapter with a summary statement of the nations after the flood.

"These *were* the families of the sons of Noah, according to their generations, in their nations; and from these, the nations were divided on the earth after the flood." (Genesis 10:32 NKJV)

Martin Luther said, "Hence one must consider this chapter of Genesis a mirror in which to discern that we human beings are; namely, creatures so marred by sin that we have no knowledge of our own origin, not even of God Himself, our Creator, unless the Word of God reveals these sparks of divine light to us from afar... This knowledge the Holy Scriptures reveal to us. Those who are without them live in error, uncertainty, and boundless ungodliness; for they have no knowledge about who they are and whence they came." (Luther, cited in Boice)

Just as God commanded Adam and Eve to be fruitful and multiply, he repeated the same to Noah and his descendants, who began to multiply and form nations and languages that spread worldwide.

Genesis 10 describes Noah and his family after they leave the ark and begin to reestablish civilization. Noah's three sons, Ham, Shem, and Japheth, spread out in different directions. They had children, their children had children, their children's children had children, and over the years, those descendants formed families, clans, tribes, and nations.

Some of those nations eventually became mighty empires and spread across vast regions. Alliances eventually formed among the various descendants of Noah's three sons. Some were friendly to Israel; others became bitter enemies of the Jews.

Chapter 10 is somewhat selective since Moses wrote Genesis 10 for a particular generation of Jewish readers. Japheth had seven sons, but Moses only zeros in on the descendants of two of those sons, Gomer and Javan. It's not that the other sons of Japheth were unimportant; it's just that the tribes that sprang from them were not critical for the Jews to know about.

What we have in chapter 10, then, is a selective but accurate account of the nations in and around the Promised Land during the time of the conquest under Joshua. What we can take away from this chapter is that what we believe is essential and how we teach what we believe to our children will affect the future of our posterity.

That's why Moses commands the children of Israel in Deuteronomy 6 with these words, "Hear, O Israel: The LORD our God, the LORD *is* one! You shall love the LORD your God with all your heart, with all your soul, and with all your strength. "And these words which I command you today shall be in your heart. You shall teach them diligently to your children, and shall talk of them when you sit in your house, when you walk by the way, when you lie down, and when you rise up."  
(Deuteronomy 6:4-7 NKJV)

Obedience to God's command is still the one condition of spiritual prosperity and success.