

**CALVARY PANDAN BIBLE-
PRESBYTERIAN CHURCH**
[Adapted from Bethel Bible-
Presbyterian Church, 10 Downing St.
Oakleigh, Vic., 3166]

DHW BIBLE CLASS

LESSON 9

THE BOOK OF GENESIS

Chapter 10-11

INTRODUCTION

We have now come to the last chapters (10 & 11) of primeval history in the book of Genesis—the beginning of beginnings. We see the creation of the first man Adam, the first woman Eve and all living creatures. We also see the first liar, Satan; the first trifler with the Word of God, Eve; the first murderer, Cain; the first person to die, Abel; the first person to escape death, Enoch; the first destruction of the world, the Flood; the first society-man and city builder, Nimrod. The chapters that follow recorded the history of the Patriarchs.

Chapter 10 has been called the Table of Nations. Seventy nations are listed: fourteen of them are from Japheth; thirty from Ham; and twenty-six from Shem. Criticisms have been made against this chapter.¹ Leupold ably discussed and discounted these criticisms. Critics should be grateful that we have this additional data from the

¹ Leupold, 356-359. Refer for a discussion of the criticisms levelled against the biblical account

Bible. And none of the biblical data has ever been disproved. We should not be perturbed by these critics. Leupold exhorted:

“Consequently, we must regard this document (meaning the biblical record) as a true and reliable testimony to the unity of the human race as well as of the development of the race from the three sons of Noah, and must be thankful for this indication of the breadth of view and universalistic standpoint of the Scriptures.”²

Chapters 10 and 11 contain very important data. They give the genealogies of families and of the origin of the nations of the world, and the beginning of the different languages spoken by man. A lengthy discussion of the genealogies and the dispersion of the people in the regions is beyond the scope of this lesson.³ We will touch in general the beginnings of the dispersion of the nations. We will look at some details of the account of the lives of the individuals who are mentioned.

The Table of Nations

The descendants of Japheth are given first. They are primarily seafaring peoples as suggested by the expression “by these were the isles of the Gentiles divided in their lands” (v.5) Ham had four sons, the youngest being Canaan (v.6). Cush begat Nimrod, and there are more details describing Nimrod. He is

² Ibid., 357.

³ If anyone is interested in a detailed treatment of this chapter, refer to Hamilton, The Book of Genesis, volume 1, pages 330-346; Aadlers, Genesis, volume 1, pages 216-242; Wenham, Genesis 1-15, pages 216-232.

introduced here as a great and well-known person in the then world (v.8). He was a skilful hunter and the expression “before the LORD” means that his ability was a gift by the grace of God (v.9). He led the people to build the tower of Babel. Nimrod is depicted as a rebel who led others in rebellion against God. Four cities were linked with his name: Babel, Erech, Accad, and Calneh. They were all in the land of Shinar, which was Babylon, and today occupied by Iraq. Canaan’s first son was Sidon, which was a well-known Phoenician city on the Mediterranean coast, about twenty miles south of Beirut. And many of Canaan’s descendants were the Jebusites, the Amorites, the Girgashites, the Hivites, and others (vv.16-18). They formed the families of the Canaanites, who dwelt in pre-Israel Palestine. Shem, the godly line, is frequently mentioned first (Gen 5:32; 6:10; 9:18; 10:1). This does not mean that he was the eldest, for he was younger than Japheth (10:21). The fact that he is mentioned first among the three sons of Noah, emphasises the divine plan that the godly line flows from him. It is the deliberate decision of the author to feature him last because he is the line which is linked with Israel. Hence, it is understandable that his genealogy is given last. The writer also highlights Shem’s descendant, Eber, whose descendants were the Hebrews. His descendants were spread out in the north-eastern regions of the river Euphrates.

Each description of the descendants of the three sons of Noah, ends with the declaration that they were divided according to their lands (territories), clans (ethnicity), languages and nations (politics). What is most interesting is that this table of nations is unique to Old Testament literature.

There is no other document of antiquity that is like it.⁴ God governs the whole world. Although God chose Israel to be special, yet Israel has a common linkage with the other nations. Paul had Genesis 10 in mind when he told the Athenians that God “hath made of one blood all nations of men for to dwell on all the face of the earth, and hath determined the times before appointed, and the bounds of their habitation” (Acts 17:26).

The Tower of Babel

The opening statement seems a little unusual. Chapter 10 already mentioned that the people were divided according to their lands, languages, families and nations. Chapter 11:1 begins with the declaration that the whole earth was of one language and one speech. The explanation of this is that the writer deliberately reverses the order. Chronologically, chapter 11:1-9 should be placed before chapter 10. That would seem logical. The reason for this reverse order as suggested is to focus on the theme of grace and judgement. Chapter 11:1-9 shows God’s judgement upon the rebellious and ungodly, and His grace when He chose Abram through whom Israel became a nation.⁵

When the world was of one language they travelled from the east and settled in “the land of Shinar” (ancient Babylon). They decided to build a city and a tower, which could reach the heavens, make a name for themselves, and settled there instead of scattering abroad. A close examination of their attitude, speech and conduct demonstrate a spirit of pride, arrogance

⁴ Hamilton, The Book of Genesis: Chapters 1-17, p.346.

⁵ *Ibid.*, 347.

and rebellion. In the two verses (vv.3,4) the word “us” was spoken five times and “we” one time. It was not wrong for them to build the city or the tower. But their attitude and actions were not right. Their pride led them to disobey God. God commanded them to spread out and populate the earth. Instead they decided to settle in one place. Their pride was further evidenced by their declaration that they wanted to make a name for themselves and build the tower so that it could reach even the heavens. They intimated their self-sufficiency. God was never in their minds or in the picture. They thought that they could manage without God. Observe they did not mention the name of God at all! And who was the ringleader? Nimrod. He was the founder of Babylon. Babylon becomes the first model of all nations, cities, and empires that raise themselves in pride.⁶

God Intervenes

Although man deliberately refuses and rejects God, and keeps Him out of his mind and work, God is still there and He is still the Creator and Ruler of the universe. God “came down” and looked at the work of man. If the people were of one language the potential for achieving anything which man can imagine was tremendous. And what is the potential of man’s imagination? God saw that “every imagination of the thoughts of his heart was only evil continually.” In order that God who had promised never to destroy the earth by flood again, and that His plan and purpose for which He created the world must take its course, He confounded their language, so that they could not understand one another’s

speech. The work of building the city came to a halt. God knows the great danger and evil that man can do to his fellow men, when they are united in rejecting and rebelling against God. So the Lord scattered them abroad. Man must populate the face of the earth; that is God's commandment to man. Thus, throughout the history of man, God has always intervened in the affairs of man for the good of man! Today we see the advancement of communication technology and the speed with which knowledge is being proliferated. It appears that man may soon be able to achieve anything he sets his mind on. The achievements of man's scientific and space programmes have been tremendous! This would cause man to be proud and think himself self-sufficient, and reject the idea of God and rebel against Him. The Word of God has predicted that perilous times will come in the last days. A man will lead the world against God and His people. God will once again intervene and put a stop to man’s wickedness. The Lord Jesus Christ will return and put an end to the evil deeds of man. Man must be taught that God is still in charge.

Abraham

The genealogy of Shem is listed in the second part of chapter 11. The focus clearly is on Terah and his three sons (v.27). The three sons of Terah were Abram, Nahor and Haran. Haran's first born was called Lot. Haran died, leaving Lot an orphan. Abram (his name before he was renamed Abraham) married Sarai (this was her name before she was renamed Sarah).⁷ After the death of Haran, Terah moved from the Ur of the Chaldees to go to the land of

⁶ Allen P. Ross, 241.

⁷ Incidentally, Abram (later Abraham) was a worshipper of gods, an idolator (Joshua 24:2).

Canaan. But half way through, they stopped at Haran and dwelt there.⁸ No reason is given. Terah took Abraham, his wife Sarah, and their nephew Lot. But Nahor and Milcah stayed behind. Attention is drawn to the fact that Sarah was barren, she could not conceive. So Abraham and Sarah had no child.

The latter passage prepares the reader for the next section on God’s dealings with Abraham.

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DAILY READINGS & DISCUSSION QUESTIONS

Daily Readings

MONDAY: Read Genesis 10:1-5; Galatians 3:26-29.

TUESDAY: Read Genesis 10:6-20; Isaiah 47:1, 10-15.

WEDNESDAY: Read Genesis 10:21-32; Romans 9:21-26.

THURSDAY: Read Genesis 11:1-9; Acts 2:1-12.

⁸ There are two locations of the Ur of the Chaldees—one located in Upper Mesopotamia, and the other in the Lower Euphrates in southwest Babylon. For a discussion of the possibility of these two sites, refer The Book of Genesis: Chapters 1-17, by Hamilton, pages, 362-365.

FRIDAY: Read Genesis 11:10-32; Deuteronomy 7:6-11.

Discussion Questions

- 1. Genesis 10 has been called the Table of Nations. What is the importance of this chapter?

- 2. Why do you think it is important to know one’s genealogy?

- 3. Describe Nimrod. What nation did he lead? What is the modern name of this kingdom? Do you find a similar trait in the present leader with that of his ancestor, Nimrod?

4. List the various tribes of the Canaanites. Where did they settle?

8. Why do you think the author is beginning to shift from all the families of the earth to one family?

5. What are the factors that divide the people into different nations?

9. The genealogy of Shem is placed between the event at Babel and the history of Abraham. What is the significance?

6. If God wasn't pleased with what the people were building, why did God not just simply destroy the city and tower?

10. How do the first eleven chapters of Genesis emphasise the need for God to save the people of the earth?

7. Compare the genealogy of Shem in Genesis 11:10-26 with that of the pre-Flood genealogy in Genesis 5. What one feature is different?

