

## “The Genealogy of the Nations” (Genesis 10)

There has been a lot of interest lately in family trees, in tracing our roots back to our ancestors. There are even software programs and genealogical web sites dedicated to helping us in our quest to find our origins. Some of us here this evening have searched our pasts, or have relatives who have, trying to figure out where we came from, so that we can understand ourselves better. This interest has been around for a long time, but it was probably the popular book and television mini-series of the 70's called “Roots” that set the search in high gear. Alex Haley, the author of the book, had a burning desire to know where he came from, so he searched out his past until he found his way back to Africa and Kunta Kinte, the man who was kidnapped from his home and sold as a slave in the Old South. His ancestry went back much further than this, of course, but this was as far as he could go with the records that he had.

Well, as you already know, God has given us a book that traces our genealogy back even further than this. It's called the book of Genesis. It's already shown us who our first parents were: Adam and Eve. It's also told us about our relation to Seth, Enosh, Kenan, Mahalalel, Jared, Enoch, Methusaleh, Lamech and Noah. I don't know if you think about this when you read the opening chapters of the book of Genesis, but you're reading about your history, not just the history of the Jews. Our lineage is the same, until we get to Noah's three sons, and even though we might not be able to trace our physical ancestors back through the chosen line, we can trace our spiritual lineage to it. This evening, we'll want to spend a little time looking at the three branches that split off from the world's family tree into the three different directions we saw last week.

Now first we need to realize that what Moses records for us here is the fulfillment of the blessing that the Lord gave to Noah and his sons in Genesis 9:1. Moses wrote, “And God blessed Noah and his sons and said to them, ‘Be fruitful and multiply, and fill the earth.’” You'll remember that this was a different blessing than the one God gave to Adam. That blessing was based on the Covenant of Works. But when that blessing was lost because of the Fall, the Lord gave Noah and his family a new blessing, one based on the Covenant of Grace, one which couldn't be lost, because it was based on the work of Christ, rather than our works. And now we see this blessing working in their lives, as Moses shows us their many children, and the directions in which they spread out.

But this genealogy also shows us something else. It gives us a prelude to the working out of the blessings and the curse that Noah gave to his sons. Remember, the Lord blessed Japheth and Shem through their father Noah, because they honored their father when he had become drunk and shamefully uncovered himself in his tent. Japheth was blessed with many children. The Lord said He would enlarge his family. But Shem received a greater blessing by being chosen as the one through whom the Messiah would eventually come. His blessing would eventually include Japheth as well, when Japheth's children would dwell in his tents, receiving the same blessing of salvation through Jesus Christ. But the Lord cursed Ham and his line through Noah, especially the line of Canaan. He would be the lowest of servants, and his children would become the servants of his brothers. We see something of the fulfillment of this in the names listed in this genealogy.

But having said this, I want you to realize that I'm not intending to trace every single family line in this list, nor to try and tell you which nations these lines represent today, except in a few cases. Most of what we know might only be speculation.

The first family line that Moses traces is that of Japheth. His sons and some of their sons are listed for us here. Now usually a genealogy begins with the oldest son and works its way down to the youngest. But Moses doesn't do that here. He begins with Japheth, who is the second born (although, as I said earlier, it is also possible that the three were triplets, cf. 5:32. But even among twins and triplets, there is still the first-born, second and the youngest). Ham is the youngest of the three. In 9:24, we read, "When Noah awoke from his wine, he knew what his youngest son had done to him." Japheth appears to be in the right place, and so does Ham. But Shem, who was the oldest (Cf. v. 21), is not, probably because he was the one who received the greatest blessing, and it's going to be his line that is traced from here on out, because, as I said, it's through his line that Messiah would come. Now we don't know much about the line of Japheth, except what I said last week, that he is generally considered to be the father of the Gentiles. Verse 5 tells us that from his sons and grandsons, "the coastlands of the nations were separated into their lands, every one according to his language, according to their families, into their nations." The fact that Moses says they were separated "according to his language" shows that he has in mind what we will see in chapter 11, namely, the tower of Babel and the separation of the nations. This is where they lived after that event took place. It's believed that the children of Japheth eventually settled in the areas North and Northwest of the Fertile Crescent (The Fertile Crescent is a very fertile crescent-shaped valley that began just North of Israel and swooped up, over and down through Mesopotamia to the Persian Gulf). This would make Japheth's home the area of Europe and Asia. Noah blessed them and said they would multiply, and here we see them stretching to the ends of the earth. This is probably the line through which each of us here has come from, at least with regard to our physical ancestry.

The second family line that Moses traces here is that of Ham. He had four sons: Cush, Mizraim, Put and Canaan (v. 6). These settled Southwest of the Fertile Crescent, in the area from Africa to Mesopotamia. Cush is considered to be the father of those who inhabited the African Continent. His name means black. It's the same word which is translated in other parts of Scripture as "Ethiopia." Cush was also the father of Nimrod, the mighty hunter. In those days hunting was an important skill, and in Mesopotamia, which is the land he eventually conquered, it was considered to be a particularly royal skill. Nimrod distinguished himself among his brothers, and eventually built several cities: Babel, Erech, Accad, and Calneh, in the land of Shinar, which is Babylonia. He also went further North into the Mesopotamian Valley into Assyria, and built Ninevah, Rehoboth-Ir, Calah, and Resen. It appears from chapter eleven of Genesis, that all of the sons of Noah and their families lived in this area at first, which is where they lived before the Flood. But it wasn't until later, at the tower of Babel, when the Lord confused their languages, that the earth was divided by languages, and they spread out over the whole face of the earth (11:9). After this dispersion, it may be that Nimrod conquered his brethren and built these cities.

Mizraim settled in Egypt and is the father of the Egyptians. Mizraim is actually the Hebrew word for Egypt. It was also one of his sons who would become the father of one of the greatest enemies of God's people in all the Bible, the Philistines (v. 14).

Not much is known about Put. It's believed that he was probably the father of the

Libyans, who live in Northern Africa.

And of course there was Canaan, the one Noah cursed, who became the father of those who lived in the land which was called by that name. The list of his children looks forward to their destruction, when the children of Israel would come into the land to conquer it. Some of these names appear only here in the Bible. But there are others which are also listed in Joshua as those tribes which were marked out for annihilation by God. In Joshua 3:10, we read, “And Joshua said, ‘By this you shall know that the living God is among you, and that He will assuredly dispossess from before you the Canaanite, the Hittite, the Hivite, the Perizzite, the Girgashite, the Amorite, and the Jebusite.’” It’s very likely that the tribes of Canaan mentioned in Genesis are included in the broader word “Canaanite.” If you look closely at verse 19, you will see some other names you might recognize: Sodom, Gomorrah, Admah and Zeboiim. These are the cities that were destroyed by the Lord Himself in a supernatural display of His wrath for their gross immorality, especially their homosexuality. As you can see, Canaan’s line was particularly cursed by the Lord. They were marked out for destruction because of their idolatry and wickedness. During the Conquest of Canaan, God commanded Israel not to allow any of them to live, because these idolatrous people might become a snare to them, which is exactly what happened. Israel failed to drive them all out, and she eventually committed spiritual adultery with their gods. And all of this came about, because Ham did not honor his father. Our actions can have severe consequences on our children.

Shem also had children: Elam, Asshur, Arpachshad, Lud and Aram (v. 22). His children lived roughly between the Japhethites and Hamites in and around Arabia. Now the name to pay attention to here is Arpachshad, because it was through his line that Messiah was to come, according to the promise made to Shem. We are told that Arpachshad had a son named Shelah, Shelah had a son named Eber, and Eber had a son named Peleg (vv. 24-25). We’re told that it was in the days of Peleg (whose name means division) that the earth was divided, which probably refers to what happened at Babel, when the world was divided by languages. But it was from Eber that Abraham came. It’s interesting that Abraham is the first person in the Bible to be called a Hebrew (Gen. 14:13). This most likely refers to his descent from Eber, since the word Eber and Hebrew are closely related. Abraham was an “Eberite.” And as you know it was through Abraham’s seed that all the nations of the earth would be blessed. Moses will pick up Eber’s descendants in the second half of chapter 11 and bring them all the way down to Abraham, and the Lord’s call to him.

Here we see the descendants of Noah multiplying and spreading out, filling the earth, even as the Lord blessed them to do. But at the same time, we also see them falling further and further away from God. It was from these tribes that all of the superstitions and false religions would come, as the wickedness of men again increased. Paul said to the men at Lystra on his first missionary journey, “And in the generations gone by He permitted all the nations to go their own ways” (Acts 14:16). But it wasn’t always going to be this way. Even though the children of Japheth would fall into darkness, yet the Lord promised eventually to bring them into the tents of Shem. Even though many of the children of Shem would also fall away from the true religion, yet the Lord would eventually call them. And even though Canaan and his children were cursed and many of them were destroyed, yet that curse would not always remain on them. The Lord had planned to send His Gospel message by the hands of His servants to every tribe, nation, tongue and kindred to gather in His elect people, those whom He foreloved and predestined from

before the foundation of the earth. God once allowed the nations to go their own way, but now He is gathering them back together through the Gospel into one kingdom and one people, the people of God. We are certainly blessed to be a part of that spiritual kingdom. If we had been born back in those days, we might very well have been born in darkness and died in darkness. But by His grace and mercy, we were born at a time and in a place where He has sent His Gospel light, and have been saved by it. But having been saved by this Gospel, it is now our privilege and responsibility to pray, to give and to labor that Christ's kingdom would continue to grow and reach out to the many who yet remain in darkness. At this Christmas season especially, let's be ready to take advantage of the opportunities the Lord will give us to gather in His sheep. And let's be ready as well to give Him renewed glory and praise for the promised gift of His Son, and in Him, eternal life. Amen.