
LIFE BIBLE STUDY

SESSION OBJECTIVE: GENESIS 10:1-11:32

To understand the purposes of the genealogies.

Multiplied Meaning

The first 11 chapters of the book of Genesis present several genealogies that, at face value, explain how the world was populated. The first genealogy begins in Genesis 2:4, and explains how man and woman were created. Cain's genealogy reveals the darker nature of humanity in 4:17-24. Seth's genealogy in chapter 5



introduces us to such characters as Enoch, Methuselah, and Noah. Noah's genealogy is recording in Genesis 6:9-10, and introduce us to his three sons, Shem, Ham, and Japheth, the future progenitors of the world. Their respective genealogies occur in chapter 10, and the latter part of chapter 11. Each of the genealogies present to us a line of individuals that inevitably include some pretty important biblical characters. From a purely historical perspective, this is helpful information. For the ancient reader, this would have provided an understanding of where these well-known individuals originated from. Historically popular individuals move into almost legendary status over time; genealogies bring a sense of humanity back to them. However, as we will discover in this lesson, there is a pattern that emerges throughout the narrative of Genesis 1-11, and the genealogies tell us *something else* as well.

An Emerging Pattern

When reading a genealogy in any given chapter of the book of Genesis, the immediate, historical value of it is pretty easy to uncover, but the bigger picture is often missed. One of the values of studying verse by verse

through any book of the Bible is that it gives the reader a sense of an overarching unity throughout the text. Themes, patterns, and cohesion of concepts become clearer. One of these patterns emerges when looking at the genealogies.

The first 11 chapters of Genesis present a sort of rotation to the reader. It goes something like this:

1. Man's Rebellion > 2. God's Judgment > 3. God's Provision Through Man

In the third step of this rotation, God's provision to mankind in spite of His judgment usually comes by way of a genealogy. The genealogy provides the reader hope because, even in spite of man's sin, God remains faithful and merciful to us by preserving a line that will produce a person of hope that God will use to carry out the next chapter of redemptive history.

ROTATION 1:

When we begin Genesis, the first rotation of this occurs in the first 4 chapters:

1. Adam / Eve's Sin > 2. Removal from the Garden > 3. Adam's Genealogy: Cain and Abel

The genealogy of Adam serves as a sign of hope for the reader. After being removed from the Garden of Eden and feeling the consequences of their sin, God does not abandon Adam and Eve. They are allowed to still procreate and as a result, Cain and Abel are born. Even though Adam and Eve rebelled, God has not abandoned humanity.

ROTATION 2:

1. Cain Murders Abel > 2. Cain is Removed from Community > 3. Seth's Genealogy: Noah

The murder of Abel by Cain is the next major act of rebellion, and Cain is immediately relegated to nomad status. Once again, we might expect God to be done with humanity, but this isn't the case. The birth of Seth demonstrates God's continued commitment to humanity. Seth serves as the replacement for righteous Abel. His line features well-known individuals such as Enoch, Methuselah, and ultimately Noah.

ROTATION 3:

1. The World Increases in Sin > 2. God Causes the Flood > 3. Noah's Genealogy: Shem, Ham, Japheth

In Genesis chapter 6, the world reaches a climax of transgression. Even angels have begun to copulate with women (Gen. 6:1-2). As a result of the wickedness in the earth, God resolves to cause a flood that kills all flesh except that of Noah and his descendants. The genealogy of Shem, Ham, and Japheth not only explains where Israel, Canaan, and the Gentile nations descend from, but also gives explanation to how the world was re-populated after the flood.

ROTATION 4:

1. Man's Pride Increases > 2. God Confuses Languages > 3. Shem's Genealogy: Abram

After the world has been re-populated, the sinfulness of man is once again at work. Genesis 11 describes how there was only one language, and the people sought to build a tower into the heavens in order to, "make a name," for themselves (Gen. 11:4). As a result, God confuses the languages so they are unable to communicate. The result is the division of people groups into different nations. Once again, we might expect God to turn His back on humanity. However, we are given another genealogy from Shem, this time one that leads us to another mighty character that God will use to begin the line that will eventually produce the Messiah, Jesus Christ. From Shem comes Abram, who eventually we know as Abraham.

As can be seen, there is a developed pattern where the genealogies serve as a sign of hope that God has not turned His back on mankind. Each time the text indicates a genealogy, it also indicates that someone notable will likely be born.

Shem, Ham, Japheth

The lines of Shem, Ham, and Japheth are included in chapter 10 in what has come to be known as *The Table of Nations*, and their respective genealogies provide some historical insight as well. Below is a brief sketch of some of the people in each lineage, and the nations that come out of them.

HAM

Of the three sons of Noah, Ham stands out as one that the Hebrew people would have taken notice of. He is the progenitor of four sons: Cush, Egypt, Put, and Canaan, the people who possessed the land that was given to the Hebrews to reclaim (Deut. 7:1-2). These people groups make up much of the ancient peoples inhabiting the modern lands of Saudi Arabia as well as the Levant. There are many names in this genealogy that are traceable to an extent, however three stand out above the rest.

Nimrod - Nimrod is the topic of much discussion in Old Testament scholarship. Some question whether or not he is a Hebrew imagining of a Babylonian god such as Marduk or Ninurta. He established Babel and other cities in the land of Shinar (Gen. 10:10). He was apparently a mighty and strong man, and a well established hunter and warrior (Gen. 10:8-9). It's unclear what is meant by the phrase, "before the Lord" (Gen. 10:9). Some argue that it means something like, "against the Lord," positing that Nimrod was not a Godly man. This is the most likely way to understand this phrase given his development of cities like Babel, as well as the fact that he is a descendant of Ham. Historically, he is said to be the first to wear a crown as an earthly king. A pre-Islam, Arabic text mentions him as a builder of towers which is consistent with the Babel narrative. Some historical figures have interpreted him to be a good man, on the other hand. *Ephrem the Syrian* (AD 306-373) recorded that he was a righteous man, and the reason he was granted lands after building in the land of Shinar was because he left in protest at what was happening there. Either way, his impact is made as he is mentioned several more times in the Old Testament (1 Ch. 1:10; Mic. 5:6).

Canaan - Canaan is the last son of Ham listed, and by far the most impactful to Hebrew history. Canaan fathers the most descendants of all of the children of Ham and his descendants end up in the Levant area in modern Israel, and were the inhabitants of the land prior to the Israelites. The reality of Canaan in this genealogy serves a major notice. The Canaanites were a despised people that Israel was commanded to destroy with no mercy (Deut. 7:1-2). They were people obsessed with idolatry, worshipping a pantheon of gods including Asherah and the oft-mentioned Ba'al. They were guilty of child sacrifice due to their recognition of the pagan god, Molech, who required the burning of children to him (Lev. 18:21). The Israelites were at odds with them constantly and yet they are reminded here in the Table of the Nations that the Canaanites descend from Noah just as they did. Despite all of their differences, their lineages can be traced back to two brothers. Perhaps there is a modern application for us as well, in that our countries of origin are at times in conflict with other nations. We are reminded in Noah's son's genealogies, that all of the world is populated by Noah's three sons.

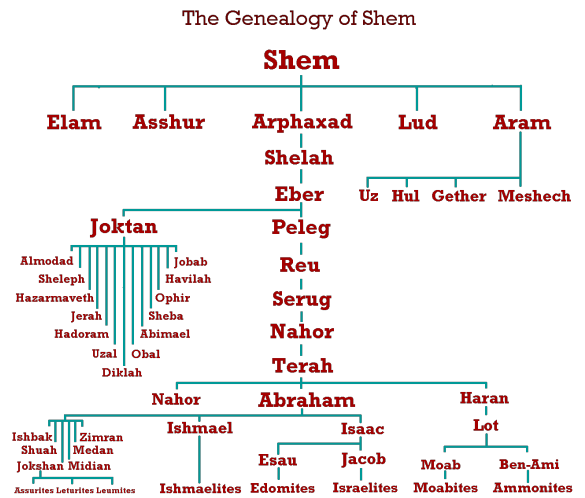
Egypt - The name of this son reflects the obvious. Egypt as a nation does eventually play a large role in the Exodus narrative. It is important to note that in Egypt's lineage we do also find, "the Philistines" (Gen. 10:14). The importance of Egypt and his descendants cannot be overstated.

JAPHETH

Japheth has seven sons and seven grandsons that are recorded in the opening part of chapter 10. The modern match of Gomer, Magog, Madai, Javan, Tubal, and Mesech are roughly, the modern day Armenians, Lydians, Medes, Greeks, Tibarenians, and Moschians. Japheth can be seen then as the father of Gentiles.

SHEM

Shem has by far the most recognizable names and significant impact on the nation of Israel, being the line that eventually produces the great patriarch, Abraham. Of course, the lineage of Abraham includes Isaac, Jacob (who becomes Israel), David (the greatest king of Israel), as well as Jesus the Messiah. The first genealogy in chapter 10 of Shem does not bring Terah or Abram into the picture, but after the events at Babel, Shem’s line is repeated in the latter part of chapter 11 and this time brings them in. This is perhaps, as mentioned above, because of the rotation of sin, judgement, and hope, where Shem’s line repeated serves as a sign of hope that God has not abandoned humanity even though He confused the languages of men.



Babel

The first part of chapter 11 unveils the drama that ends with the eventual split of people groups along with their languages. All 9 verses form a chiastic structure. Below is the form of it.

- A "the whole world had one language" (v. 1)
- B "there" (v. 2)
- C "each other" (v. 3)
- D "Come, let's make bricks" (v. 3)
- E "Come, let us build ourselves" (v. 4)
- F "a city, with a tower" (v. 4)
- G "the LORD came down..." (v. 5)
- F' "the city and the tower" (v. 5)
- E' "that the men were building" (v. 5)
- D' "Come, let us ... confuse" (v. 7)
- C' "each other" (v. 7)
- B' "from there" (v. 8)
- A' "the language of the whole world" (v. 9)

The whole Babel narrative highlights the arrogance and pride of mankind to think that they could build a tower so big that they would, "make a name for themselves" (Gen. 11:4). There is irony in the Hebrew, however, that puts the size of this tower into perspective. Verse 5 says, "And the LORD came down to see the city and the tower, which the children of man had built." For a tower that was to go into the heavens, God still has to bend down to see it because of how small it is in comparison to Him.

The ultimate result of this amalgamation of mankind is that God confuses their language in order to keep them from accomplishing any other nefarious activities. Babel explains that, while language diversity is interesting and even something to celebrate in our modern world, the diversity of language in the beginning was a result of God’s judgment. The different languages served as a stumbling block for many people of other nations being reached by the nation of Israel. It isn’t until Pentecost in Acts chapter 2, that God begins to undo the work at Babel by His Holy Spirit (Acts 2:11).

Study Questions

Day One

1. Read Genesis 10:1-5. Write down the descendants of Japheth in a tree form, notating who fathered who.

2. Read Genesis 10:6-14. Write down the descendants of Ham in a tree form, notating who fathered who.

Day Two

1. Read Genesis 10:15-20. Write down the descendants of Canaan in a tree form, notating who fathered who. What is the significance of Canaan to Israel's history?

2. Read Genesis 10:21-32. Write down the descendants of Shem in a tree form, notating who fathered who.

Day Three

1. Read Genesis 11:1-4. What was the plan of mankind? Was it a good plan? Did God approve?

2. Read Genesis 11:5-9. What was the response of God? Why did he confuse their languages? What does the Babel story explain with regard to the nations?

Day Four

1. Read Genesis 11:10-24. Write down who fathered who in a tree form, noting the years that each person lived.

2. Read Genesis 11:25-32. Write down who fathered who in a tree form, noting the years that each person lived. Where was Abram from? Where was he headed and where did he end up?

Week 8 Discussion: Pride

Genesis 11 describes a time in human history in which pride had become a towering issue (pun intended). Mankind worked together to, "make a name for themselves" (Gen. 11:4). God, seeing the future harm they would do to themselves in their pride, stopped them from going any further by confusing their language. Talk as a group about how pride influences the choices we make, and how God sometimes disciplines us, not to condemn us, but as an act of grace.

1. Icebreaker: Do you struggle with pride? If so, in what areas of your life do you struggle the most? (Ex. job, hobby, etc.)
2. In your opinion, what is the difference between pride and confidence? Is it bad to have confidence?
3. Has God ever stopped your progress in something you were working pridefully towards? Share with the group what happened, how it made you feel then, and how it makes you feel now looking back.
4. What does the New Testament teach about pride? (Hint: See Mark 7:20-23; 1 Jn. 2:16)
5. Is pride acceptable in the world? Why or why not?
6. In your opinion, what is the central problem with pride? Why is it wrong? What does it convey?

Takeaways:

1. The genealogies all indicate that God is faithfully still working through humanity, even in the midst of His judgment against humanity's sin.
2. Babel was an act of judgment against pride that prevents us from understanding one another, but is being undone by the Holy Spirit in Christ.

PRAYER REQUESTS: