

**Bethel Bible-Presbyterian Church**  
10 Downing Street, Oakleigh, Vic. 3166

**DHW**  
**BIBLE STUDY CLASS**

**BOOK OF GENESIS**

**Lesson 9**

**Genesis 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 record 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.<sup>1</sup> Leupold

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<sup>1</sup> Leupold: For a discussion of the criticisms levelled against the biblical account refer to pp. 356-359.

ably discussed and discounted these criticisms. Critics should be grateful that we have this additional data from the Bible. And none of the biblical data has ever been disproved. We should not be perturbed by these critics. Leupold rightly commented: “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.”<sup>2</sup>

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 concerning the genealogies and the dispersion of the people in the regions is beyond the scope of this lesson.<sup>3</sup> 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. Chapter 10 is a record of the generations of the three sons of Noah. Chapter 11 focuses on the genealogy of Abraham, who is the father of God’s chosen people, the Jews. The following suggested

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<sup>2</sup> *Ibid.*, 357.

<sup>3</sup> 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.

divisions of the two chapters help in tracing the various genealogies:

- 1) The generations of the sons of Noah: Shem, Ham, Japheth (10:1-32)
  - a. The sons of Japheth (10:2-5)
  - b. The sons of Ham (10:6-20)
  - c. The sons of Shem (10:21-32)
- 2) The people of the world spoke one language (11:1-5)
- 3) The beginning of languages in the world (11:6-9)
- 4) The sons of Shem - the ancestors of Abraham (11:10-32)

### ***STUDY THE WORD***

#### **The Generations of the Sons of Noah: Shem, Ham & Japheth**

The record of the descendants of **Japheth** is given first. They were primarily seafaring people as suggested by the expression *by these were the isles of the Gentiles divided in their lands* (v.5). From the Jewish standpoint, the expression is also a reference that the whole world is Gentile. The four words – *lands, tongue, families, nations* – give the actual principle of classification, which includes the personal, individual and tribal aspects.

**Ham** had four sons, namely, Cush, Mizraim, Phut, and Canaan, who was the youngest. (v.6). Cush begat

Nimrod, and there are more details describing Nimrod. He is 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 Jebusite, the Amorite, the Girgasite, the Hivite, the Arkite, Sinite, Arvadite, Semarite, and the Hamathite (vv.16-18). They formed the families of the Canaanites, who dwelt in pre-Israel Palestine (10:19b) and spread abroad.

**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. However, it is the deliberate decision of the divine author to feature him last here because he is the line which is linked with Israel. Hence, it is understandable that his genealogy is given last. The author also highlights Shem's descendant, Eber, whose

descendants were the Hebrews.<sup>4</sup> 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 (linguistics) and nations (politics). As mentioned earlier they are the basis of classification of the various peoples of the world. 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.<sup>5</sup> 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 People of the World Speak One Language**

The opening statement seems a little unusual. Chapter 10 already mentions that the people were divided according to their lands, languages, families and nations. Chapter 11:1

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<sup>4</sup> The word "Eber", in Hebrew is *heber* (the region beyond) from which the name Hebrews is derived.

<sup>5</sup> Hamilton, The Book of Genesis: Chapters 1-17, p.346.

begins with the declaration that the whole earth was of one language and one speech. The explanation of this is that the author deliberately reverses the order. Chronologically, if chapter 11:1-9 is placed before chapter 10, it would seem logical. The reason for this reverse order seems to be to focus on the theme of grace and judgment. Chapter 11:1-9 shows God's judgment upon the rebellious and the ungodly, and His grace on Abraham, whom He chose to become the father of the nation of Israel.<sup>6</sup>

When the world was of one language, the people 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, to make a name for themselves, and to settle there instead of scattering abroad. A close examination of their attitude, speech and conduct demonstrates a spirit of pride, arrogance and rebellion (vv. 3, 4). The words *let us*, *us* and *we* were spoken six times altogether. 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 *lest we be scattered abroad* (4b). Their pride is further evidenced by their declaration *to build a city and a tower, whose top may reach unto the heaven to make a name for themselves* (4a). They

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<sup>6</sup> *Ibid.*, 347.

were proud and boasted of their self-sufficiency. God was never in their minds or in the picture. They thought that they could manage without God. Observe that they did not mention the name of God at all! And who was their ringleader? He was Nimrod. He was the founder of Babylon. Babylon thus became the first model of all nations, cities, and empires that raised themselves in pride.<sup>7</sup>

### **The Beginning of Languages in the World**

Although man deliberately refuses and rejects God, and keeps Him out of his mind and work, God is still there. He was and still is the Creator and Ruler of the Universe. He is sovereignly in control of the affairs of men. God came down and looked at the work of man. The people were of one language and had the potential for achieving anything, which man could imagine was tremendous. And what is the potential of man's imagination? Man's every imagination of the thoughts of his heart was only evil continually. God in His mercy confounded their language so that man could not understand one another. God's plan and purpose must take its course and that man should spread abroad and populate the other parts of the earth must not be thwarted. The work of building the city therefore came to a halt. God knew the great danger that evil man could do to his

fellow men, when they were united in rejecting and rebelling against God. Man must spread over the surface 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. English has become the *lingua franca* of the world. 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 marvellous and astounding! This has led man to be proud and to think of himself as self-sufficient, and to reject the existence of a Creator God and to rebel against Him. The Word of God has predicted that perilous times will come in the last days. A certain superman will lead the world against God and His people. God will once again intervene and put a stop to man's wickedness. This time it will be the return of the Lord Jesus Christ, who will put an end to the evil and wicked deeds of man. Man needs to be taught that God is still in charge.

### **The Sons of Shem - the Ancestors of Abraham**

The genealogy of Shem is listed in the second part of chapter 11. The focus clearly is on Terah and his three sons whose names were Abram, Nahor, and Haran; and the firstborn of Haran was Lot (11:27). Haran died prematurely leaving Lot an orphan.

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<sup>7</sup> Allen P. Ross, 241.

Abram (his name before he was renamed Abraham) married Sarai (this was her name before she was renamed Sarah).<sup>8</sup> Nahor took Milcah, who was the daughter of Haran, to be his wife. After the death of Haran, Terah moved from Ur of the Chaldees to go to the land of Canaan. But on the way they stopped at Haran and dwelt there.<sup>9</sup> 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. This passage prepares the reader for the next section which records God's dealings with Abraham.

### *PRACTICAL VALUE*

We learn about the general history of man, and it is a truthful record. There is no human book that speaks with such simplicity and authority regarding the origin of these phenomena which we see around us. Each nation of the world started with a man who was the head. A nation today is represented by its Head of State.

In the light of this knowledge, a nation consists of individual families. So when the family unit is healthy and strong, the nation is strong. Each

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<sup>8</sup> Incidentally, Terah, Abram's father, was a worshipper of gods, an idolator (Joshua 24:2).

<sup>9</sup> There are two locations of 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 to The Book of Genesis: Chapters 1-17, by Hamilton, pages, 362-365.

nation is characterized by its tongue or language, which helps the people to be united. Finally, an essential characteristic of a nation is its land. It is God's plan that human kind though they are one as *homo sapiens* should be of one nation or the other. The movement to make all nations one, speak one language, under one head without God, is to revive the time of the Tower of Babel, which promises no good thing for man.

There is nothing wrong in planning for one's life on earth. Planning is wrong when God is put out of the picture. To plan without God is to plan like Nimrod. We must guard against having the same attitude and thinking as Nimrod and his followers. It does not please God. Pride and arrogance are an affront to God. On the other hand, humility and meekness are commendable in the sight of God.

Psychologists, who reject the existence of God, formulate their ideas and counsel on the premise that man is a creature of circumstances. Rather man is the architect of circumstances. He creates circumstances and he becomes his own victim. This is clearly shown in the Genesis record. Man's rejection of biblical truths, like the existence of God, results in his own downfall and problem. *GOD BLESS YOU.*