

GENESIS 9-11

NOAH'S SONS AND THE TABLE OF NATIONS

FEBRUARY 2, 2023

Welcome back! Thank you for walking through Scripture with me today!

When we left off, Noah and his family had just left the ark. God had established the Noahic Covenant. Please check out the lesson notes and my last blog for details about that covenant, but the key points of the covenant are as follows:

- 1) God promises not to destroy the world again by flood. That's good news, but that doesn't mean He will never judge the world again. The Book of Revelation tells us that there will be a final judgement of man following the second advent (coming) of Jesus Christ. At that time, there will be a final judgement of fire, which will consume Satan's kingdom and his believers before they are consigned to the lake of fire for eternity.
- 2) God promises not the further curse the environment, which had already turned against mankind because of the Fall of Man and was further cursed when Cain spilled his brother Abel's blood. Mankind will still have to labor to bring forth crops for survival (as every farmer can tell you). God promises that the cycle of days, weeks, seasons, etc. will continue until the arrival of the New Kingdom after second advent. **THIS DOES NOT MEAN THAT WE WILL NOT EXPERIENCE NATURAL DISASTERS (obviously). THIS DOES NOT MEAN THAT WE CAN'T CURSE THE ENVIRONMENT OURSELVES.** Remember, brothers and sisters: God made mankind to be the stewards of His creation. We are still His viceroys and caretakers. It is our job to take care of nature and animals. God doesn't NEED our help, but He asks us to show our gratitude by treating our environment as the gift that it is.
- 3) Mankind could now hunt animals for food, BUT we are not to eat the blood of animals. Blood is considered to be life. It is highly symbolic in the Bible. Blood atones for sin because the wages of sin is death. Animal sacrifices in Israel would temporarily atone for sin because the animal died in place of the sinner. Jesus Christ's death on the cross permanently paid the wage of sin for all those who believe in him. Life is a gift of the Sovereign Lord, and only He has the right to take away life, which is one of the reasons that God

at this point declares that murderers can be executed by family members of their victims. Man is made in the image of God; What we do to another human in violence is an act of violence against God Himself (and conversely, what we do in love and kindness for other humans, we do for God).

- 4) The sign of the covenant is the rainbow. Man will see the rainbow from below and remember that God has promised not to destroy the world by flood again (though, as I mentioned, we can still expect localized disasters as a consequence of the curse on the environment or our own carelessness as stewards of creation). God will see the rainbow from above and know that it is a bridge between Himself and man (God doesn't need the rainbow to remind Him of His promises; He is faithful to remember and fulfill any promise He makes. The fact that He preserved Noah's family, and by doing so preserve the line of Eve, from whose lineage God promised to send the Messiah/Redeemer, shows that God is faithful to the covenants He makes with man).

This brings us to life after the flood. Obviously, God knew that preserving mankind meant that sin would remain in the world because we were born in a sinful state because of Adam and Eve's sin. Even those who are considered heroes of the faith in Scripture still have times when they botch things up (only Jesus Christ was able to live a life without sin when He was among us in the flesh). The best and most righteous of believers still stumble occasionally on their walk with God. We'll see it with Abraham, Moses, David, and Peter and most of the nation of Israel. God knows we will sin. His concern is that we acknowledge and confess our sins, in repentance turn away from our sinful behavior, pray for His forgiveness, and resume walking with Him in obedience.

Noah is caught in what we'll say is not his finest moment in *Genesis 9*. The narrative tells us that he was drunk on wine, unconscious, and naked in his tent. For whatever reason, his son, Ham, goes into Noah's tent and finds his father in that condition. To make the situation worse, Ham goes and tells his brothers, Shem and Japheth. His brothers try to treat Noah with respect by carefully covering up their father without actually looking at him in his naked condition. Naturally, Noah wakes up later and realizes what has happened.

Just to clarify one point: Drinking wine is not a sin. The Bible makes it clear that wine is considered a blessing (it's used in rituals to worship God). However,

drunkenness and nakedness is certainly considered disgraceful if not sinful. Likewise, gazing on the nakedness of one's father does not honor him. Things might have gone differently for Ham if he'd even walked out of the tent and said nothing to his brothers; Noah might never have known what had transpired. Who knows?

Noah's reaction to Ham's disrespectful behavior is called a curse in Scripture, but when we examine Noah's words it seems that God had given Noah some insight about the future of his sons, for his "curse" is quite prophetic. This passage marks the only recorded speech of Noah in the Scriptures.

Noah's curse/prediction is that Ham's son, Canaan, would become the lowest of servants, slaves to his brothers. Why Noah curses Canaan instead of Ham is not explained in Scripture. Canaan's descendants settled in the land that God would later promise to the descendants of Abraham (who come from the line of Shem). This land would become the nation of Israel. Part of Canaan's land included Sodom and Gomorrah, infamous for their wickedness and the destruction God rains on them in judgement for their sins (God couldn't find even one righteous person there to justify sparing the cities). God's main issue with the Canaanites is that they fell away from relationship with him into paganism, worship of false gods. When one examines the table of nations, it's disappointing to ponder how many of these people groups fell away from the Lord and how many people went into the grave eternally separated from the one true God. Your heart surely must break for these lost sheep who will never be saved.

Canaan was the patriarch of the Hittites, Jeusites, Amorites, Hivites, Sinites, and Canaanites (to name a few). His son, Sidon, founded a trade city on the Mediterranean Sea. His son, Jebusite, had descendants in Jehu, which was conquered by King David and became Jerusalem. Ham's other descendants founded very powerful nations, some of which would persecute Israel and even be used as God's instruments of discipline of Israel when they, too, fell into idolatry and worship of false gods. Ham's descendants would establish Babylon, Assyria, Egypt, Saudi Arabia, Yemen, the Sudan, Libya, ancient Ethiopia, Nubia, Philistia, and Crete. So, don't feel too badly for Ham; his descendants still established great nations who saw great accomplishments.

A descendant of note from Ham's line is Nimrod. His name meant "mighty hunter" and he was called a mighty hunter before God, but this is not a compliment. Nimrod established cities in Bablyon and Assyria, including the city of Babel, which was a center of rebellion against the Lord. Nimrod was quite tyrannical in ruling over his cities. Babel was unified against the purposes of the Lord. Recall that God told Adam and Eve and Noah all to multiply and fill the earth with His image. God wanted men to spread out so that they would grow His kingdom on earth. Those in Babel specifically resisted this command, resolved to stay in one location. In Genesis 11:3-4, they specifically decide to build a city. Within that city, they construct a ziggurat, which is a stepped pyramid. In pagan cultures, this pyramid was meant to reach the heavens so that their gods and goddesses could descend the steps down to walk with men. In the case of Babel, the desire of the people was to ascend the steps to heaven, to be like God, and to make a name for themselves.

Ascending to heaven and supplanting God? Sound like anyone else we have read about in Scripture (Satan)? The purpose of the people of Babel was their own glory, not God's. Unity had given them a false sense of power that fueled their rebellion. Matthew 23:12 tells us: "for those who exalt themselves will be humbled, and those who humble themselves will be exalted". Let me put it this way: Do you remember God's name? Christ's name? The names of Paul, Abraham, David, Elijah, and other faithful believers?

Do you remember the name of anyone who lived in Babel and participated in this rebellion? Are their names recorded in the Bible? Do you think their names are recorded in the Book of Life?

God once again must send judgement/discipline, and once again He acts from a place of mercy and grace. Rather than destroy the people of Babel for their rebelliousness, He confuses their languages which breaks their unity. He then scatters them to various corners of the earth.

Babylon in the Bible would because a city that epitomizes worldliness, ambition, pride, moral corruption, defiance of God, and zeal for power. In the Book of Revelation, Babylon stands in contrast to the holy city of Jerusalem. In fact, Babylon is symbolized as a harlot, a prostitute, because it is the heart of Satan's godless world unity against the Lord while Jerusalem stands as the bride awaiting Christ.

Moving on from Ham's descendants, let's look next at Japheth. Noah blessed that Japheth would extend his territory and live in the tents of Shem.

Japheth's descendants became the Gentile nations and primarily settled in the areas that are now Europe. Shem's descendants became the Hebraic nation of Israel. Scripture tells us that God purposed Israel to shine His holy light to the Gentile nations, to beckon them to worship Him and to the salvific faith in Christ that would lead to their redemption. Israel would be called a "holy" city, which does not denote righteousness but rather that they were specifically set apart for worship and service to the Lord. So, when Noah prophesied about Japheth living in the tents of Shem, he was saying that Shem's descendants were meant to lead Japheth's descendants to God.

Japheth's descendants did form some nations that would rise against Israel (Ezekiel 38 mentions Gomer, Magog, Tubal, and Meshech specifically. Tubal became the Turkish people; Gomer's descendants included Germany, France, Spain, and the British people. Magog became the Scythians. Madai became the Medes (Darius the Mede would be used for God's purposes in Israel, as we'll discover later when we read about Ezra and Nahum). Javan's descendants were the Greeks. Meshech's descendants became the Slavic people. Japheth's other descendants included the Celts, Trojans, Armenians, and Nysians. Again, we're seeing great nations emerging from the sons of Noah.

This brings us to Shem, the patriarch of Israel and the son through whom the line from Eve to the Redeemer/Messiah Christ would continue. It is interesting to note in the Bible that the lineage of Christ does not automatically pass through the firstborn children. Seth was Adam and Eve's third son. Isaac was Abraham's second son. Jacob was Isaac's second son. Jesus descended from Judah, who was Jacob's fourth son. So, birth order in the Bible does not necessarily confirm birthright (especially if you traded away your birthright like poor Esau. Oops.).

Also notice that Noah does not bless Shem—he blesses the Lord, the God of Shem. The glory for what God was about to do belonged only to God; Shem was the vessel chosen to be part of God's redemptive purpose. Everything that Shem would possess was a gift from God. His descendants had been pre-chosen to be God's people, to record God's Word for the rest of the world to come to know the Sovereign Lord. Moses would record the first five books of the Bible

(the Pentateuch): Genesis, Exodus, Leviticus, Numbers, and Deuteronomy, recording the foundational doctrines of the Jewish faith and within it God's plans for the redemption of all mankind. Shem's descendants would be a holy nation that would model God's perfect ways so that others would be drawn to His salvation. "Holy" in this instance does not mean perfect or righteous (only Jesus Christ would live a perfect, sinless life while He was here in the flesh), but rather "set apart for the service and worship of God".

So, yes, Noah praised God for allowing Shem to be a small part of a great redemptive plan. This is the perspective we ALL need to keep throughout life: What we do in life, in ministry, at work, in the home, among friends, is all gifts of God's grace. All we are given are gifts as God's stewards to be put to use for God's glory and purposes. We also must humbly and gratefully acknowledge the greatest of all God's gifts: Our salvation through Jesus. Like Shem, it is our honor to be pieces in God's redemptive plan, sharing God's Word and letting all that we do shine His light so that others can be drawn to salvation through Jesus Christ.

Obviously, the most famous of all Shem's descendants is Jesus Christ. Next in fame would be Abraham and the line that became the nation of Israel. What about the remainder of Shem's descendants?

Elam, son of Shem, was a patriarch of the Persian empire. His son, Asshur, was the patriarch of Assyria (where Ham's descendants would build cities). Job lived in Uz, which was named for Shem's grandson. Ophir, Havilah, Raamah, and Sheba would settle regions famous for deposits of gold. Shem was the patriarch of nations like Arabia, Assyria, Syria, and the Chaldeans and Lydians (Ham would also have descendants who settled in Arabia and the Persian Gulf).

There is some debate among theologians about Shem's descendant, Peleg. The Bible states that Peleg was so named because in his time, the earth was divided.

Shem was patriarch of the Arabian peoples. Ham's descendants primarily established themselves in Northeast Africa. Japheth's descendants settled in what became Europe and Asia Minor.

What a rich diversity of nations and people groups would begin with Noah and his three sons under the grace of the one true God (Peleg means division). Some theories are that Peleg lived in the time of the dispersal of people from the

Tower of Babel. Others speculate that there was some cataclysm in Peleg's time, a continental drift of some kind that caused land to literally separate or divide. Still others speculate the Peleg's name refers to the dispersion of two races from his father, Eber. The first line spread into Mesopotamia and Syria; the second line moved south into Arabia. Bottom line: Scripture doesn't provide further illumination about Peleg, so these theories remain just that—theories, not facts upon which to build your theology. The lesson remains that Scripture must translate Scripture, and man must not add to or take away from God's Word by teaching speculations or unfounded translation as though it is actually God's Word. IF THE BIBLE DOESN'T CONFIRM IT, NEVER PRESENT IT AS THEOLOGICAL FACT.

Seeing how the current national landscape began, let's see what redemptive history has in store for the myriad descendants of Noah by turning to Revelation 7:9: *"After these things (the Great Tribulation) I looked, and behold, a great multitude which no one could number of ALL NATIONS, TRIBES, PEOPLES, and TONGUES, standing before the throne and before the Lamb, clothed with white robes, with palm branches in their hands"*.

Do you know what this means, brothers and sisters? John is saying that EVERY NATION and EVERY RACE of mankind will be among the people of the Kingdom of Christ, one family under one God. The LORD made His redemptive plan so that any person from any nation—regardless of whether they descend from Shem, Ham, or Japheth, regardless of their nationality, race, social status, culture, or other origins---has the same chance to receive Jesus Christ as Savior and become a part of His eternal kingdom. Every tribe of man will be represented there before Christ's great white throne after the Great Tribulation and the Day of the Lord.

Remember: Jesus wants YOU to be among them. For this purpose, God made you in His image. For this purpose, He set redemptive history into motion with the Adamic Covenant. For this purpose, He forgave man's wickedness repeatedly and preserved the descendants of Eve who would be the Messianic line. For this purpose, God the Son came to the earth in the flesh to die on the cross. For this purpose, God sent the apostles to spread the Good News of Christ's salvation to all corners of the earth, where He had long ago ordained man to scatter and grow His kingdom on earth. For this purpose, God the Holy Spirit

guided the writing of the Old Testament and New Testament that we would have God's special revelation and come to know Him better.

Let us never grow tired of showing gratitude to the Lord. Let us never grow weary of sharing His Word with others and spreading the Good News of Christ so that every lost sheep can find its way back to its one true Shepherd.