

70 KIDS AND COUNTING

GENESIS 10:1-32 OCTOBER 20, 2021

The Porteau-Boileve family can trace their lineage back to the 1,600s. In 2012, 4,514 Porteau-Boileves got together and set the Guinness World Record for largest family reunion.¹

Tonight we'll read about the growing families of Shem, Ham, and Japheth. God asked them to fill the earth and spread out over it. We'll see that they did that very thing. They didn't come *together* in a reunion, they scattered far and wide. This text is referred to as the "Table of Nations," and it's a remarkable document. Scholars point out that this record of descendants, clans, and nations, is historically unparalleled. One non-Christian scholar writes:

*"The Table of Nations is...unprecedented in the ancient Near East...sketch[ing] a panorama of all known human cultures - from Greece and Crete in the west through Asia Minor and Iran and down through Mesopotamia and the Arabian peninsula to northwestern Africa. This chapter has been a happy hunting ground for scholars armed with the tools of archaeology."*²

But this is more than a list. Woven through these names is a story about God accomplishing His plan in the midst of generations and migrations. There are so many ways He *could* do what He wants to do, but time and again He demonstrates that His choice is to use *persons* like you and me to make good on His plans and promises.

Genesis 10:1 - These are the family records of Noah's sons, Shem, Ham, and Japheth. They also had sons after the flood.

In these genealogies, we will see 70 names listed. 14 from Japheth, 30 from Ham, and 26 from Shem. These don't include every child that was born to each person - no daughters are listed, for example. More likely what is given here is a list of the "principle nations" during the time of Moses.³ The *Bible Knowledge Commentary* describes this table as an explanation of political, geographical, and ethnic affiliations. This is significant when we remember that God's plan for salvation was predicated upon *calling out* a specific people from the nations of the world, from their culture, from their religions, from their norms, and doing a new thing with them. It will happen through the line of Shem, from which we get the term *semitic* people. But first we start with Shem's brother Japheth.

Genesis 10:2-5 - ²Japheth's sons: Gomer, Magog, Madai, Javan, Tubal, Meshech, and Tiras. ³Gomer's sons: Ashkenaz, Riphath, and Togarmah. ⁴And Javan's sons: Elishah, Tarshish, Kittim, and Dodanim. ⁵From these descendants, the peoples of the coasts and islands spread out into their lands according to their clans in their nations, each with its own language.

¹ <https://www.guinnessworldrecords.com/world-records/largest-family-reunion>

² Robert Alter *The Five Books Of Moses: A Translation With Commentary*

³ Jamieson-Fausset-Brown *Commentary Critical & Explanatory On The Whole Bible*

Genesis wraps up Japheth's portion quickly because his line has the *least* to do with the main characters we're getting to: Abraham, Isaac, Jacob, and his 12 sons. 76% of this book focuses on *that* family, and the Japhethites simply won't figure into the story very much.

Generally speaking, these sons of Japheth became the Indo-European people. They were the forerunners of the Greeks, Persians, Russians, and others around the Black Sea, also the Romans and perhaps Spaniards.

A few names may have jumped out at you from the list: Magog is one of them. Magog and his brothers Meshech and Tubal, feature prominently in the end times prophecy of Ezekiel 38 and 39. Not those guys specifically, but their descendants, along with Gomer and some of Ham's line (Cush and Put) will come down from the uttermost parts of the north to destroy God's people, Israel, and they will be miraculously destroyed so that many nations will know the Lord.⁴

You *23andMe* fans might also have recognized the name Ashkenaz in verse 3. Maybe you've heard the term "Ashkenazi Jew." How does that work if the descendants of Ashkenaz are Gentiles? There's some dispute, but current consensus is that the sons of Ashkenaz ended up in the Rhineland region of France and Germany. In the Middle Ages, some Jews moved to that area where the descendants of Ashkenaz had settled. This is where Yiddish originated and was used until the 20th century.⁵ In this region, the Jewish people developed not only their own language, but their own customs and interpretations of Judaism. By the 11th century, it's believed that only 3% of the global Jewish population belonged to these "Ashkenazi" Jews.⁶ In fact, DNA research has found that all Ashkenazi Jews alive today can trace their genetic heritage back to a group of just 330 people who lived about 700 years ago.⁷ Naturally, given their location in Europe, the Ashkenazi population was decimated by the Holocaust. But, today, about 80% of the global Jewish population are Ashkenazi - more than 10,000,000.⁸

Genesis 10:6-7 - ⁶Ham's sons: Cush, Mizraim, Put, and Canaan. ⁷Cush's sons: Seba, Havilah, Sabtah, Raamah, and Sabteca. And Raamah's sons: Sheba and Dedan.

If you're familiar with the Old Testament, more of these names stand out to you. The Old Testament centers around a certain family - the family of Israel - and *these* folks were their neighbors. And, by neighbors, I mean "archenemies." Mizraim is an old term for Egypt.⁹ Canaan we recognize. From the line of Ham come nations who settled in southern Arabia and Africa, but more importantly: Egyptians, Babylonians, Philistines, Assyrians, and all the Canaanites. These are the rivals, the adversaries, the antagonists, and seducers who drew Israel away from the Lord.

They are exemplified by their first emperor, who we meet in verse 8.

⁴ Ezekiel 38:1-16

⁵ <https://www.jewfaq.org/ashkseph.htm>

⁶ https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Ashkenazi_Jews

⁷ <https://www.latimes.com/science/sciencenow/la-sci-sn-ashkenazi-jews-dna-diseases-20140909-story.html>

⁸ <https://www.britannica.com/topic/Ashkenazi>

⁹ See Waltke, Morris

Genesis 10:8-12 - ⁸ Cush fathered Nimrod, who began to be powerful in the land. ⁹ He was a powerful hunter in the sight of the Lord. That is why it is said, "Like Nimrod, a powerful hunter in the sight of the Lord." ¹⁰ His kingdom started with Babylon, Erech, Accad, and Calneh, in the land of Shinar. ¹¹ From that land he went to Assyria and built Nineveh, Rehoboth-ir, Calah, ¹² and Resen, between Nineveh and the great city Calah.

He wasn't just a great elk hunter. The name 'Nimrod' means, "We will rebel!"¹⁰ From birth, it seems, he was seen as the man who would *deliver* the sons of Ham from God's rule over their lives. From the beginning, the kingdom of Babylon built itself in opposition to God and His Word. That aim continues through the time of the Bible and into the last days. Nimrod founded this wicked city and then went on to found *other* wicked cities, like Nineveh.

When it says that he was a powerful hunter, commentators point out that the term used there is sometimes used for hunting *men*.¹¹ He can form for us a prototype of the man we know as the Antichrist. A ruler with great might who establishes a kingdom in rebellious opposition to God and who destroys many lives. Bruce Waltke points out that Nimrod was a *hunter*, not a shepherd as God's Deliverer would be. You see, when we don't go God's way, when we go man's way (which is *Satan's way*), it is the *opposite* of what is good and leads to life. We can see it in human endeavors, in human relationships, in human expressions. It may have the *appearance* of greatness from man's perspective, but God's perspective is the important one. What does Nineveh, Babylon, the human heart look like in *His* sight?

Now, some of you may have heard something *else* about Nimrod. His name comes up at Christmas time. Perhaps you've heard something like this:

Nimrod was another name for the first king of Babylon called Sargon I. He married a woman named Semiramis. Now Nimrod was cut down in the prime of life and then the pagan myth said he became a god. Semiramis then had a virgin birth and named her son Tammuz, who was god reborn. Tammuz was born on December 25th. And the religious tradition developed that Babylonians would put a yule log in the fire on December 24th, the next day it would have turned into an evergreen tree and then to celebrate Tammuz and Nimrod, you would put gifts beneath the tree for him.

*Oh, and by the way, Semiramis is the same as Ishtar and everything you celebrate at Easter is **pagan**, too because the modern church has been "submerged under pagan superstition."*

Maybe you've heard that. I've heard that preached from really solid pastors. We've had people who used to come to the church move away and then get drawn into this and tried to 'save us' from celebrating Christmas and Easter with things like Christmas trees and Easter eggs.

¹⁰ See Waltke, *Bible Knowledge Commentary*

¹¹ *NET Study Bible Notes*

Here's the problem: *It's not true!* These ideas come from a book called *The Two Babylons* written in 1853 by a guy named Alexander Hislop who believed that all this paganism had infiltrated the church. It's been proven that his book is full of assumptions, misunderstandings, and outright fictions. This has been demonstrated by Christian author Ralph Woodrow who many years ago agreed so heartily with *The Two Babylons* that he wrote an updated book *based on that work*.¹² But then Ralph started taking a second look at Hislop's work. And he discovered that *The Two Babylons* wasn't historical at all. For example: We have no idea if Nimrod was Sargon I. There's no consensus or proof of that. Even if he was, Sargon and Semiramis *weren't married*. They lived 1,000 years apart! In ancient myths and writings, Semiramis is *never* linked with Ishtar. All of it is fabricated.

After examining Alexander Hislop's work, one source concluded: "It is not historical, it is not Biblical, it is not accurate and it is not correct."¹³

Does that mean that there's *no* instance of a practice (like putting an evergreen tree in your house) having some sort of pagan connection? No. So, should we *avoid* those things? This is an area of Christian liberty.

Colossians 2:16 - ¹⁶Therefore, don't let anyone judge you in regard to food and drink or in the matter of a festival or a new moon or a Sabbath day.

Romans 14:5-6 - ⁵One person judges one day to be more important than another day. Someone else judges every day to be the same. Let each one be fully convinced in his own mind.

As Christians, we take the cross, a symbol of Roman brutality, and take it for ourselves to symbolize the greatest act of love and mercy ever known. We give gifts because God gave us the greatest gift, His own Son. We gift gifts like the Magi did to celebrate the birth of the King. Now, if the Holy Spirit directs you to *avoid* some of these things, then obey. But don't get drawn off into this strange, unbiblical perspective. To help you out a little more, in that same book, Hislop says that Semiramis *also* invented soprano singing and that round communion wafers are pagan.

Back to Genesis!

Genesis 10:13-20 - ¹³Mizraim fathered the people of Lud, Anam, Lehab, Naphtuh, ¹⁴Pathrus, Casluh (the Philistines came from them), and Caphtor. ¹⁵Canaan fathered Sidon his firstborn and Heth, ¹⁶as well as the Jebusites, the Amorites, the Girgashites, ¹⁷the Hivites, the Arkites, the Sinites, ¹⁸the Arvadites, the Zemarites, and the Hamathites. Afterward the Canaanite clans scattered. ¹⁹The Canaanite border went from Sidon going toward Gerar as far as Gaza, and going toward Sodom, Gomorrah, Admah, and Zeboiim as far as Lasha. ²⁰These are Ham's sons by their clans, according to their languages, in their lands and their nations.

¹² <https://www.equip.org/article/the-two-babylons/>

¹³ <https://www.followintruth.com/nimrod-semiramis-and-tammuz>

See also: <https://www.historicalblindness.com/blogandpodcast//blind-spot-a-tale-of-two-babylons>

These verses “pace off” the borders of the Promised Land,¹⁴ which would later have significance to the children of Israel who were sent to receive this land and drive out the Canaanites.

We’ve seen multiple times in this chapter a reference to “languages.” But, didn’t everyone speak the same language? They did until chapter 11. And after the events of Genesis 11, the people of the world spread out in the ways we’re reading about here in chapter 10.

Genesis 10:21-25 - ²¹And Shem, Japheth’s older brother, also had sons. Shem was the father of all the sons of Eber. ²²Shem’s sons were Elam, Asshur, Arpachshad, Lud, and Aram. ²³Aram’s sons: Uz, Hul, Gether, and Mash. ²⁴Arpachshad fathered Shelah, and Shelah fathered Eber. ²⁵Eber had two sons. One was named Peleg, for during his days the earth was divided; his brother was named Joktan.

Some Bible versions translate Shem as the middle brother, some place his as the elder.¹⁵ It’s a linguistic thing. Take your pick. The 5 names we really care about in Shem’s line are: Shem, Arapachshad, Shelah, Eber (from whom we get the word *Hebrew*)¹⁶ and Peleg. This is the line from which comes Abraham, Isaac, Jacob, Judah, David, and, ultimately, Christ Jesus our Lord.

We’re told that in the days of Peleg the earth was divided. It makes most sense to interpret this as the division and scattering of people at the Tower of Babel in chapter 11. It’s also possible that this is referring to something else, like a devastating earthquake,¹⁷ which might have led to the breaking up of the continents.¹⁸ Or, some suggest it was referring to some large Mesopotamian canal project.¹⁹ Or it could be referring to political division. The context seems to favor the division of people by language, since that’s been referenced multiple times in these verses.

Genesis 10:26-31 - And Joktan fathered Almodad, Sheleph, Hazarmaveth, Jerah, ²⁷Hadoram, Uzal, Diklah, ²⁸Obal, Abimael, Sheba, ²⁹Ophir, Havilah, and Jobab. All these were Joktan’s sons. ³⁰Their settlements extended from Mesha to Sephar, the eastern hill country. ³¹These are Shem’s sons by their clans, according to their languages, in their lands and their nations.

You might have heard that the Jobab listed here might have been Job from the Bible. The reason is because, in the Septuagint there is an extra verse at the end of Job saying that his name was Jobab. The problem is, even if that verse is accurate, the two Jobabs have different fathers. But you might come across that if you listen to Bible studies on this passage.

Genesis 10:32 - ³²These are the clans of Noah’s sons, according to their family records, in their nations. The nations on earth spread out from these after the flood.

¹⁴ Waltke

¹⁵ *NET Study Bible Notes*

¹⁶ Henry Morris *The Genesis Record*

¹⁷ Alter

¹⁸ Morris

¹⁹ See Kidner & *CSB Study Bible Notes*

What we're seeing here is just five generations from Noah but lots of activity in a relatively short time. We see scattering and empires built and nations formed. The seeds of unrest, opposition, and confusion had been planted and would yield millennia of war and struggle. Yet, all the while, God accomplishes His work through *lives*. That's an interesting thought for us as we move through a book like Genesis. While *man* builds *empires*, *God* builds *people*. He does His work through your life, not through towers or cities. Through the regular course of life, as His people walk with Him and have families, listen to His leading, obey His word, He's able to do what is impossible for man.

This passage can encourage us that, even if it seems like the world is closing in, God is still able to do all that He has promised. And even if your family goes off into some strange direction, *you* can continue to go God's way and do what's right. You can keep following Him. And even if you make a mistake, which we all will, like Noah or Abraham or any of the other heroes of the faith, we can get back up and back in step with our loving Lord.

At a macro level, most of us are probably Japhethites, by and large. Praise God that we Gentiles have been *grafted in* to God's special people. He has always allowed that, by the way. Canaanites like Rahab and Ruth were always ready to be welcomed by God. As a Japhethite nation, one concern we should have is our relationship to that special group of Shem's descendants: the nation of Israel. The book of Joel says that God will hold nations accountable for how they treat Israel. And so we should entreat our leaders to honor and support that special nation.

Finally, this text reminds us that, despite our cultural differences, we are all brothers and sisters. There is only one race: The human race. Yes, there is difference in language and historical ethnicity, but those things should not divide us. Especially in the Church we are reminded that there is no longer Jew or Greek, barbarian or Scythian. We are all *one* in Jesus Christ.

In 2015, a fellow by the name of A.J. Jacobs put on the *Global Family Reunion* in hopes of breaking the Guinness Word Record set by the Porteau-Boileves. The idea was that, since the entire human race is one big family, anyone could show up. The event attracted a lot of attention. Celebrities and statesmen got involved, along with companies like 23andMe and the Federation of Genealogical Societies.²⁰ They didn't end up getting enough people and I'm not sure Guinness would've recognized their theory anyway. But you and I *are* part of a continuing, global family, not just of humans (made in the image of God), but part of the *family* of God - sons and daughters brought into His household to be loved and used for His glory and scattered out to invite others to join in till one day we're all reunited with our Maker forever in that city whose Builder and Maker is God.

²⁰ <https://globalfamilyreunion.com/about/>