



Part 28 – The Earth is the Lord's

Genesis 10

Genesis chapter 10 marks the beginning of a new section or “book” with the words “these are the generations of...” In this case it is the record of the generations of Noah's three sons, Shem, Ham, and Japheth. This is a remarkable chapter. As scholars of the ancient world have

pointed out, there simply is no other record from the ancient world addressing the spread of the human population. This may be due to the fact that the pagan religions of the ancient world were composed of regional or national or ethnic deities. Their interest therefore rarely reached beyond their own narrow borders or ethnic identities. In sharp contrast, the Bible underscores the universality of Yahweh. He is the Almighty Creator and the earth and everything in it belongs to him.

In chapter 10 we are once again reminded of the unity of the human family. For all of our differences we flow from the same spring. Paul preached this very truth to the philosophers in Athens: “And he made from one man every nation of mankind...” (**Acts 17:26**). As Derek Kidner has written, “Not every nation known to the Old Testament is enrolled here, but enough are present to make the point that mankind is one, for all its diversity, under the one Creator” (104).

1. God exercises his sovereign rule over all the nations.

- As we have seen before, the Bible is interested in recording events and the lives of nations and people as they truly were. As the Apostle Peter will write many generations after the days of Noah and his sons, “For we did not follow cleverly devised myths...” (**2 Peter 1:16**). The Bible simply has no peer in ancient literature with its interest in dates, names, and events. There is in the Bible a regular effort to help its hearers discern between the myths of the pagans and the true Word of God which locates its claims in history. Thus, the whole chapters devoted to names and dates are crucial to understanding the Bible's uniqueness among other ancient writings and its historical trustworthiness.
- The line of Japheth is recorded in verses 2-5. It is the briefest of the three records. Japheth's line also represents those nations which are remotest from Israel. Derek Kidner writes, “Of the three families of humanity, Japheth and Ham are dealt with first, to leave a clear field to the history of Shem in the remainder of the book.” But again, in this section on Japheth, though it's the shortest of the three sections, the language that is used about the lands which the sons of Japheth occupy, reminds us that God even cares about the nations remotest to Israel. Unlike the gods of the pagans, Yahweh is no regional or ethnic deity. He is sovereign over all nations whether they recognize him or not.
- Interestingly, until late in chapter 11 we have no idea where we will find Israel in this genealogical account of the peoples of the world.¹ Later in the Pentateuch we will read that “The Most High gave the nations their inheritance, when he divided mankind...” (**Deuteronomy 32:8**). In the NT the Apostle Paul will make the same point when he says that every family in heaven and on earth receives its name from God the Father (**Ephesians. 3:14**). The living God is the God of every person, every people, every nation, whether or not they will admit the fact. The movements and fortunes of nations and the rise and fall of kings are due to the outworking of Yahweh's will. A major theme of the later books of the OT is that, as his servants, however unwittingly, the Lord will use pagan nations — especially Assyria and Babylon — to punish and discipline his covenant people. There are no peoples, no nations, there is no human history that lies outside God's sovereign rule and that is not part of his eternal purpose for the world.

¹ Bruce Waltke, Genesis (Zondervan: Grand Rapids, 2001) pp. 174-175

2. God calls every nation to a new humanity in Christ.

- In chapter 10 the inspired writer uses anachronism (a chronological misplacement) by recording events which took place after chapter 11 in chapter 10. In other words, chapter 10 reports on people and events who lived much later than what is described in chapter 11. The division and scattering of the nations which is described in chapter 10 is explained in chapter 11 with the account of the Tower of Babel. Old Testament scholar Bruce Waltke suggests that the reason for this anachronism is for the purpose of setting forth the nations first as objects of God's blessing before they become objects of his judgment.
- No other document like Genesis chapter 10 has been discovered in the literature of the ancient world.² This interest in the entire world, in the whole of mankind — where it came from, where it is going — a large world of which Israel was but one very small part, is uniquely biblical. Indeed, it is striking that in this Table of Nations Israel is not mentioned. Many other nations are mentioned that came to be long after Israel had become a people and a nation. In this, a theological point is being made that Yahweh is the God of all the peoples of the world, not of Israel only; he is the God of the Gentiles as much as he is the God Israel.
- In the church of Jesus Christ there is no discrimination between Jew and Greek and Roman and Barbarian. In Christ it is impossible to belong to the “wrong race.” In **Ephesians 1** we're told of God's purpose to unite all things in Christ, things in heaven and things on earth. In **Ephesians 3** we're told that the mystery long hidden but now revealed in the gospel is that the Gentiles are heirs together with Israel, members together of one body, and sharers together in the promises in Christ Jesus.
- The Apostle Paul loves what Christ has done for the nations of the world; “For he himself is our peace, who has made the two [Gentile and Jew] one and has destroyed the barrier, the dividing wall of hostility, by abolishing in his flesh the law with its commandments and regulations. His purpose was to create in himself one new man out of the two, thus making peace, and in this one body to reconcile both of them to God through the cross, by which he put to death their hostility” (**Ephesians. 2:14-16**).
- **Revelation 7:9-12**

3. The whole world is the church's concern.

- **Acts 17:22-31** – “And he made from one man every nation of mankind to live on all the face of the earth, having determined allotted periods and the boundaries of their dwelling place” (Vs. 26).
- In preaching to the Gentiles in Athens Paul appealed to Genesis 10 as a basis for evangelism. The people on the Areopagus thought that the only place in the world to live was Athens and that the only race to be was Greek. The people of Athens divided the world into two racial classes – Greeks and barbarians. Non-Greeks were primitive savages in their view. But the Athenians had a further division between the men of Athens and the rest of the Greeks. They regarded themselves as the true sons of Greece.
- Also listening to Paul were the Roman soldiers, the conquerors of Greece, keeping law and order at the Areopagus. Romans divided the world up into Roman citizens and barbarians. They too were all racialists; all their certainty that they were true and real men lay in their racial and national sense of self.
- Then there was Paul himself. He had at one time been a committed racialist. A “Hebrew of the Hebrews” he had called himself. Jews tended to see the world in terms of two groups: Jews and Gentile dogs. As a Pharisee, Paul would have thanked God every day that he wasn't a Gentile. But the gospel forced a radical change upon him. As a Christian, Paul would have understood Genesis 10 as the antithesis of his former racialism. His conclusion is that God made every nation of men the Greeks, the Romans, the barbarians – that they should inhabit the whole earth.
- Paul can see that when God singled out Abraham and made promises to him and his descendants it was not to make them into some master race. It was rather to use Abraham as the starting point from which to bring the blessings of the Seed of the woman to the whole world. Paul understood this and he went to Athens to make Jews, Romans, and Athenians his brothers in Christ.
The times of ignorance God overlooked, but now he commands all people everywhere to repent, because he has fixed a day on which he will judge the world in righteousness by a man whom he has appointed; and of this he has given assurance to all by raising him from the dead” (**Acts 17:30-31**).

² Nahum Sarna, JPS Torah Commentary on Genesis (Jewish Publication Society, 2001) p. 69