

The Book of Beginnings

Section 4

The Generations of the Sons of Noah (10:1–11:9)

1. The Sin (9:20–23)

Ham sees “the nakedness of his father” (v. 22). What does this mean?

- Possibly, Ham violates his father.
- Possibly, Ham violates his mother – “the nakedness of his father” is a euphemism.

People argue for these two interpretations on the basis of v. 24.

- Probably, Ham took perverse pleasure in his father’s shame, and he tried to expose his father’s shame to his brothers. He violates the fifth commandment (Ex. 20:12).

2. The Curse & Blessing (9:24–29)

First, Noah utters a curse (v. 25). Canaan is Ham’s son. We don’t know why God sees fit to curse Canaan as opposed to Ham’s other sons. When we read about the Canaanites, we do discover that they evidence the same perversion as their forefather.

Second, Noah utters a blessing (vv. 26–27). (1) The LORD will be the God of Shem. (2) He will cause Japheth to dwell in the tents of Shem. (3) He will subject Canaan to both Shem and Japheth.

3. The Table of Nations (10:1–32)

This chapter includes an introduction and a conclusion (vv. 1, 32). It’s divided into three sections, according to Noah’s sons. From biblical references and literary sources of antiquity, it’s possible to trace most of the names and places to present-day nations and civilizations.

- The sons of Japheth (vv. 2–5): the Indo-European people.
- The sons of Ham (vv. 6–20): the Mesopotamian, Oriental, and African people.
- The sons of Shem (vv. 21–31): the Semitic people.

Today, there are nine major civilizations: Western, Latin American, African, Islamic, Sinic, Hindu, Orthodox, Buddhist, and Japanese. We can trace these back to Noah’s three sons.

“This very chapter, even though it is considered full of dead words, has in it the thread that is drawn from the first world to the middle world and to the end of all things. From Adam the promise concerning Christ is passed on to Seth; from Seth to Noah; from Noah to Shem; and from Shem to this Eber, from whom the Hebrew nation received its name as the heir for whom the promise about the Christ was intended in preference to all other peoples of the whole world. This knowledge the Holy Scriptures reveal to us. Those who are without them live in error, uncertainty, and boundless ungodliness; for they have no knowledge about who they are and whence they came” (Martin Luther).

4. The Tower of Babel (11:1–9)

In 10:8–12, we have the story of Nimrod. His name means “rebellion.” He became a cruel tyrant. His kingdom was centered in Babel (Babylon).

In 11:3–4, man says, “come.” In other words, he purposes to do something. In 11:7, God says, “come.” In other words, He purposes to do something.

(1) What does man purpose to do?

- “Let us build a city.” It’s the city of man – “the way of Cain” (Jude 11).
- “Let us build a tower.” The tower has religious significance. It’s idolatrous.
- “Let us make a name.” Man wants to make a name for himself, not God.

(2) What does God purpose to do?

- God comes down (v. 5).
- God confuses their language (vv. 6–7).
- God scatters them abroad (v. 8).

Man’s futile efforts are summed up in a single word – Babel (confusion). We can trace the history of Babel throughout the Bible. It was situated on the Euphrates River about 35 miles southwest of modern-day Baghdad. In the ninth century BC, it reached its zenith ... the Babylonian Empire. In the OT, from the time of its first mention until its destruction by the Persians, Babylon is synonymous with idolatry and rebellion against God. Although the city was destroyed long ago, the Bible still points to the spirit of Babylon as epitomizing man’s opposition to God. In Rev. 17–18, Babylon is pictured as a prostitute who seduces people with her glamour. It’s “Babylon the Great” – some religious system which controls the kings of the earth, makes the merchants of the earth rich, and sheds the blood of the saints. Yet, God has declared its final destiny (Rev. 18:20–21). As for the city of God (the seed of the woman), its destiny is quite different. See Rev. 3:12–13; 21:1–4.