

Genesis 10:6-20
The Table of Nations, part 2
The Sons of Ham

Life is full of change. Some changes we expect, like the weather or the success of a favorite sports team. Other changes come as more of a surprise, like the announcement of an addition to the family. But some things we think will never change. Like time. After all, an hour is an hour. We could not imagine it being changed to fifty minutes, or seventy.

But this week, the International General Conference on Weights and Measures will vote to officially change the weight of the kilogram. Le Grand K, forged in 1879 of a combination of platinum and iridium and housed in a locked vault outside Paris, has been the standard measure of the kilogram for nearly 140 years. But this week, the weight of a kilogram will change.

This might not seem particularly unsettling (after all we do not use the metric system) but it does remind us that even the scientific facts we take for granted are human understandings and, therefore, impermanent. Thankfully, it is not so with God and His Word. The facts of Scripture are unchanging. New discoveries by historians and archaeologists may augment our understanding of the past, but they can never change the truths of Scripture. It is important to remember that as we return to our study of the Table of Nations.

But let us also remember that as we continue to look at the Table of Nations, while it would be easy for us to get bogged down in (or indulge ourselves with) historical detail, the wiser course would be to recognize in this Table of Nations the sovereignty of God. After all, even the particularly historical passages of Scripture were not included to indulge the historian. Neither were they written simply to satisfy the cultural archaeologist.

We must acknowledge that God is sovereign over all His creation, and that included the repopulating the earth. People procreated, traveled, and settled in accordance with His divine mandate. Therefore, there is, in fact, great theology in the Table of Nations. As we saw last time, the Table of Nations is the fulfillment of the promises of God to Noah. During the episode of the Flood, from the time God first commanded Noah to build an ark, until years later when Noah and his family finally disembarked after the waters subsided, the land dried, and the earth became habitable again, God made, and renewed, His promises to Noah.

Practically speaking, the Table of Nations is a geographic representation of the peoples of the world as they established themselves in the generations after the Flood. From Noah and his three sons, humanity spread out over Asia, Europe, and Africa - from the plateau of modern-day Iran to the Mediterranean, from the Black Sea to modern-day Somalia.

We must remember that this is the world described at the time of the writing of Genesis. The Israelites have become a people, endured 400 hundred years of slavery in Egypt, received the Law from God, and prepared to enter the Promised Land of Canaan. This is the world described in the Table of Nations. We

must keep in mind that after the Flood (and before the Tower of Babel) the peoples of the world lived in relatively close proximity to each other.

The Table of Nations is ordered according to the three sons of Noah. Though their birth order was likely Shem, Ham, and Japheth (Genesis 6:10), the list given here reverses that order and deals first with the generations of Japheth, then those of Ham, and then finally those of Shem. Last time we looked at the generations of Japheth. These people groups proved to be those with whom the nation of Israel (line of Shem) would have the least contact. Their relationship with Israel were more limited due primarily to their geographic remoteness.

This week we will look at the line of Ham. The descendants of Ham became the Canaanites, with whom Israel would become involved far too often, and usually to its detriment.

The Sons of Ham

There are four sons of Ham mentioned in Scripture. The narrative began with the *tōlēdōt* formula we have seen before. “Now these are the records of the generations of Shem, Ham, and Japheth, the sons of Noah; and sons were born to them after the flood. . . . The sons of Ham were Cush and Mizraim and Put and Canaan” (Genesis 10:1, 6). We have seen the *tōlēdōt* formula before in Genesis 2:4, “this is the account of the heavens and the earth when they were created, in the day that the Lord God made earth and heaven” and Genesis 5:1, “this is the book of the generations of Adam.”

Taken together, the sons of Ham became the peoples of northern Africa and the Middle East. These people eventually became the traditional enemies of the descendants of Abraham from the line of Shem. Our passage today is surrounded by the bookend phrasing that reminds us of the previous passage regarding the sons of Japheth, and which we will see again when we look at the sons of Shem, as the narrative concludes with the restatement that “these are the sons of Ham, according to their families, according to their languages, by their lands, by their nations” (v. 20).

The Sons of Cush

The genealogy is simply stated. “The sons of Cush were Seba and Havilah and Sabtah and Raamah and Sabteca; and the sons of Raamah were Sheba and Dedan” (v. 7). Some of these sons of Cush are identifiable, others much less so. In general, we can suggest that they spread out to the shores of the Red Sea and the southern regions of Arabia. For example, *Cush* was known in antiquity as Nubia, in Africa (today Ethiopia). It was referenced in Genesis 2:13 and later in Isaiah 37:9 and Jeremiah 13:23.

Seba is all but unknown to us. It is associated with Cush and Egypt in Old Testament passages such as Isaiah 43:3 and Isaiah 45:14. Both the Greek historian Herodotus and the Jewish scholar Josephus claim that Seba was the ancient capital of Ethiopia. *Havilah*, also, cannot be determined with certainty, and is further confused by there being another Havilah in the Table of Nations as a descendant of Shem. We do know that Havilah was a region rich in gold (Genesis 2:11) and it provided a refuge for Ishmael and his descendants (Genesis 25:18). Eventually, the Amalekites lived there, before they were conquered by Saul (1 Samuel 15:7). Taken together, these details point to some region of Arabia, though more than that cannot be said with assurance.

Sabtah and *Sabteca* are not necessarily Arabian names. There was the ancient city of Shabwat which served a main center of southern Arabia. Tantalizingly, history also records a Sabaka, who ruled in ancient Ethiopia and even challenged Egypt for hegemony in the eastern Mediterranean (c. 712-700 BC). This king was succeeded by his brother Sabataka who ruled for the next decade. Sabataka's brother, Tirhakah is mentioned as a leader of Cush in 2 Kings 19:9 and Isaiah 37:9. But all of this requires some extrapolation of the text, and perhaps it is best to simply leave it by stating that the general area of southern Arabia is the best we can do to identify the location of these two descendants.

Raamah is mentioned in ancient inscriptions as a city in southwest Arabia. Scripture records it as being a trading partner with Tyre and as an ally of *Sheba* in Ezekiel 27:22. Raamah had two sons who are also mentioned in the genealogy. Both of these grandsons of Cush established families that became known for trade in Arabia (Psalm 72:10; Ezekiel 27:15). *Sheba* is specifically mentioned as an important trading center in the time of Solomon. The famous Queen of Sheba once visited Solomon after a famous interview with his majesty, marvelled at his wealth and wisdom.

“⁶Then she said to the king, “It was a true report which I heard in my own land about your words and your wisdom. ⁷Nevertheless I did not believe the reports, until I came and my eyes had seen it. And behold, the half was not told me. You exceed in wisdom and prosperity the report which I heard. ⁸How blessed are your men, how blessed are these your servants who stand before you continually and hear your wisdom. ⁹Blessed be the Lord your God who delighted in you to set you on the throne of Israel; because the Lord loved Israel forever, therefore He made you king, to do justice and righteousness” (1 Kings 10:6-9).

Dedan was likely in northern Arabia and bordered Edom. Ancient records also indicate that Dedan engaged in a lucrative trade with Tyre. In a prophecy against Edom, Jeremiah wrote,

“Flee away, turn back, dwell in the depths,
O inhabitants of Dedan,
For I will bring the disaster of Esau upon him
At the time I punish him” (Jeremiah 49:8).

One particular son of Cush is given an elaborate introduction, rather than simply being listed in the genealogy.

“⁸Now Cush became the father of Nimrod; he became a mighty one on the earth. ⁹He was a mighty hunter before the Lord; therefore it is said, ‘like Nimrod a mighty hunter before the Lord.’
¹⁰The beginning of his kingdom was Babel and Erech and Accad and Calneh, in the land of Shinar. ¹¹From that land he went forth into Assyria, and built Nineveh and Rehoboth-Ir and Calah, ¹²and Resen between Nineveh and Calah; that is the great city” (v. 8-12).

This digression in the Table of Nations is likely due to three facts. First, Nimrod became legendary, apparently so much so that even the audience of Moses' time would have recognized the name. Second, Nimrod was credited with founding some very prominent cities that impacted the history of Israel directly. Finally, whereas it seems most of the descendants of Japheth, Ham, and Shem acquired territory and established themselves by mere diffusion, Nimrod was a conqueror. In that sense, he was much more like the typical ancient Near-Eastern rulers known to us from history.

First, Nimrod was a legendary hero. As the writer of Chronicles repeated it, “Cush became the father of Nimrod; he began to be a mighty one in the earth” (1 Chronicles 1:10). But other than his presence in history as a great warrior, being more precise about the identification of Nimrod is difficult. Some have identified him with either Marduk, a leading god of the Babylonians, Ninurta, the Babylonian god of war, or even the divine hero Gilgamesh, the legendary king of the Sumerian city of Uruk and the main character in the *Gilgamesh Epic*. All of these, however, assume something of a mythological construction of the text, rather than a factual and historical understanding of Scripture.

In terms of finding Nimrod among the actual historical figures of the ancient world, Sargon the Great of Akkad has been mentioned as a leading candidate. Another possibility is Naram-sin, the grandson of Sargon the Great, who ruled the Akkadian empire (c. 2334-2284 BC). The Egyptian ruler Amenhotep III and the Assyrian king Tukulti-Ninurta I have been suggested as well. The latter has received particular interest since he was not only the first Assyrian king to conquer Babylon and rule over both, but was also known for his great building projects, which seems to align with what the Bible says about Nimrod. But the reality is that there is no need to try to find a historical figure to be Nimrod. Nimrod can simply be a real, historical figure himself.

Scripture tells us that Nimrod was a noted ruler and a great hunter, that he became so famous that a proverb evolved based on his fame, and that he established cities in both Upper and Lower Mesopotamia (the area of the Tigris and Euphrates Rivers). This latter fact helps the reader with, at least, geographic, identification. It seems that Nimrod first established himself in Shinar, with the founding of Babel, Erech, Accad, and Calneh. And Shinar was the region of ancient Sumer and Akkad.

Babel was given special mention because of its location of the famous tower (Genesis 11:2). Later it was known as Babylon, which became the capital of a great empire under Hammurabi (18th century BC) and later Nebuchadnezzar (6th century BC). Erech was the Sumerian city of Uruk located about 160 miles to the southeast. Accad (Akkad) was the center of Sargon's empire, and eventually it described the entirety of Upper Mesopotamia. Calneh, is not identified, though it is mentioned in Amos 6:2 as cities conquered by the Assyrians. The name Shinar is referenced in Scripture as the city of one of the kings who faced Abraham after the abduction of Lot (Genesis 14:1).

From his base here, Nimrod moved to establish cities in what became known as Assyria. The four mentioned in this narrative are Nineveh, Rehoboth-Ir, Calah, and Resen. That Assyria was known as the land of Nimrod is attested by the prophet Micah (Micah 5:5-6). Nineveh became the most noteworthy of these cities, and the book of Jonah has brought it everlasting notoriety. It was the capital of the great Assyrian empire, which reached its dominance in the 9th century (BC). Located on the eastern bank of the Upper Tigris, it is today opposite the city of Mosul in Iraq. About twenty miles to the south is the city of Calah, known to the Akkadians as Kalkhu. Interestingly, in this passage Calah is mentioned as the great city, not Nineveh. Resen has never been decisively located, and neither has Rehoboth-Ir.

The Sons of Mizraim

The author is much more brief in relating the genealogy of Mizraim, the second son of Ham. “¹³Mizraim became the father of Ludim and Anamim and Lehabim and Naphtuhim ¹⁴and Pathrusim and Casluhim (from which came the Philistines) and Caphthorim” (v. 13-14). One clue is that since all the words end in ‘im’ we can see that they are related ethnically. Another fact that helps in identifying these people groups is that Mizraim is the Hebrew word for Egypt. The term included both Upper and Lower Egypt and was referenced by the Psalmist as the “tents of Ham” in Psalm 78:51.

Ludim is associated with western Asia Minor (modern Turkey) in Isaiah 66:19, but with Ethiopia in Jeremiah 46:9. Since there is a Lud mentioned in the line of Shem (Genesis 10:22), perhaps it is best to consider the Ludites of Asia Minor as the Shemite branch of the family and those in Ethiopia as the Mizraim branch, since again, the Mizraimites are generally considered Egyptian. The *Ananim* are mentioned in cuneiform texts as the Anami, a people of Cyrene, an ancient city in Libya. The *Lehabim* are also Libyan. The *Naphtuhim* may be the people who eventually lived in Memphis in Egypt, though there are also groups of that name in Lower Egypt as well.

Pathrusim are a Hebrew word for the inhabitants of Pathros in Upper Egypt. The Old Testament prophets regularly connected this people group with Egypt (Isaiah 11:11; Jeremiah 44:1; Ezekiel 29:14). *Casluhim* and *Caphthorim* should be considered as one group, since the biblical text claims that both of these were ancestors of the Philistines. *Casluhim* is a mystery, but since Upper Egypt and Middle Egypt have already been referenced, it may not be unnatural to assume that these people settled in Lower Egypt. *Caphthorim* is likely connected with either Crete or some other Aegean island. This may seem out of place since the other brothers are African, but there is no reason to suppose that some migrated into the Mediterranean and settled the nearby islands. Also, extra-biblical sources as well as Amos 9:7 and Jeremiah 47:4 argue for a Cretan origin of the Philistine peoples.

The Sons of Canaan

Put is the only son of Ham not to be provided with a genealogy. Ezekiel references “Ethiopia, Put, Lud, all Arabia, Libya and the people of the land that is in league will fall with them by the sword” (Ezekiel 30:5), and “Persia, Ethiopia and Put with them, all of them with shield and helmet” (Ezekiel 38:5). Perhaps suggesting that the descendants of Put settled in North Africa or Arabia is the best we can conjecture.

But it is the sons of Canaan that dominate this passage. This ought to be expected considering the role these peoples were to play in the life of the people of Israel.

“¹⁵Canaan became the father of Sidon, his firstborn, and Heth ¹⁶and the Jebusite and the Amorite and the Girgashite ¹⁷and the Hivite and the Arkite and the Sinite ¹⁸and the Arvadite and the Zemarite and the Hamathite; and afterward the families of the Canaanite were spread abroad.

¹⁹The territory of the Canaanite extended from Sidon as you go toward Gerar, as far as Gaza; as you go toward Sodom and Gomorrah and Admah and Zeboiim, as far as Lasha” (v. 15-19).

Geographically speaking, the land west of the Jordan River is included in the designation. In the ancient world, this territory was frequently under the control of Egypt, as can be seen from Egyptian and other texts that speak of Canaan as an administrative district of the Pharaoh. But Canaan can also be seen as a people group (Numbers 13:29 and Deuteronomy 1:7). Occasionally the Canaanites can even be specifically identified by reference to certain tribes, such as the Amorites (Genesis 15:16).

Some scholars have observed that it is surprising to find that the Canaanite peoples, the enemies of Israel, are themselves Semitic in their origin. Yet the narrative of Noah's curse of Ham's son Canaan in Genesis 9:20-27 is consistent with the genealogy and, in fact, one of the points of emphasis in the Table of Nations is the interrelatedness of all peoples, even the future enemies of Israel.

Sidon is distinguished as the firstborn. The city established under that name became one of the chief cities of Phoenicia, and remained so throughout the age of the patriarchs and the time of Moses, though eventually that honor would pass to the city of Tyre in the 11th century BC. It was located about 30 miles of the modern day city of Beirut. *Heth* are the Hittites, though they are not to be confused with the representatives of the famous empire of Anatolia, but rather these were peoples who lived in the hill country of Canaan, specifically around what came to be known as Hebron. The cave of Machpelah was purchased from Ephron the Hittite and became the family tomb of the patriarchs (Genesis 23, 25, 49, 50). However, it is not impossible to consider that the Hittites that dominated northern Mesopotamia and Anatolia in the 18th-12th centuries BC are descended from this branch of the family.

The *Jebusites* were the inhabitants of Jebus, known in the Bible as Jerusalem. They inhabited the land of Canaan long before the Israelites arrived and dominated the hill country of what today is the West Bank of the Jordan River (Genesis 15:21; Exodus 3:8). At the time of David, Jerusalem was their center (Joshua 15:63).

The *Amorites* are referred to in Akkadian texts as dominating the areas of modern Syria and Lebanon. (Genesis 14:7, 48:22). The oaks of Mamre was associated with the Amorites (Genesis 14:13). These people also pre-dated the Israelites in Canaan. Abraham formed an alliance with some Amorite kings in his war against those who had abducted Lot (Genesis 14). Eventually these Amorites would conquer the ancient city of Babylon.

Details regarding the *Girgashites* are scarce, except for the fact that they were also encountered by the Israelites upon entering Canaan (Joshua 3:10, 24:11). The same is true of the *Hivites*. They may be best identified as the Horites, who lived in the area from Shechem north to Lebanon, and are simply represented in Scripture as a people group that opposed the Israelite occupation of Canaan (Exodus 3:8; Deuteronomy 7:1). They also may be related to the Hurrians who ruled in Upper Mesopotamia from about 2200-1700 BC. The rape of Dinah, the daughter of Jacob, was perpetrated by Shechem, "Shechem the son of Hamor the Hivite" (Genesis 34:2).

The *Arkites* came to live along the coast of Lebanon in the city of Irqata. The *Sinites* were likely their neighbors, though more than that cannot be said. They are mentioned only here and in 1 Chronicles 1, though they are mentioned in the Amarna correspondence (clay tablets that were exchanged between

rulers in Egypt and their representatives in Canaan). Some Akkadian texts reference a Phoenician city of Siyanu that may be related.

The *Arvadites* are mentioned frequently in Near-Eastern texts as well as in Ezekiel 27:8, 11, where they are associated with Tyre. They inhabited Ruad, an island off the northern Phoenician coast, and the city of Arvad which is about 90 miles north of modern Beirut. The *Zemarites* are mentioned in Akkadian texts and in the Amarna correspondence. These people lived in Simirra, an ancient city which was along the coast of what is today modern Syria. *Hamathites* were residents of Hamath, an important city on the Orontes River, some 130 miles north of modern Damascus. Their territory marked the northern limits of Israel during the reign of Solomon and Jeroboam (1 Kings 8:65; 2 Kings 14:25-28).

The territorial boundaries stated in the text indicate Sidon as the northernmost limit and Gerar, as far as Gaza marking the southwestern extremity. To the southeast, the border included the Dead Sea as indicated by the cities Sodom and Gomorrah, and the much less well known Admah and Zeboiim, though their precise location is still a mystery. Lasha is unknown, but its association with these other cities would suggest a southern location near the Dead Sea.

In sum, the boundaries given here of Canaan correspond with what we know from ancient Egyptian texts of their province of Canaan, since Egypt ruled this area for much of the time before the conquest by Joshua.

Takeaways

Again we see the hand of God as he sovereignly orchestrated the repopulation of the earth according to His plan for history. God is sovereign over all His creation, and that included the repopulating the earth. These people procreated, traveled, and settled in accordance with His divine mandate.

And these truths of Scripture are unchanging. Though the modern historian or archaeologist has yet to find evidence of each of these people groups, there is no reason to suppose that the lack of an outside historical record implies that the Bible is mistaken. The Bible is the Word of God, and as such deserves not only our attention but our trust as an accurate record of history.