

# **Tower of Babel(Gen 10-11)**

## **The Descendants of Shem, Ham and Japheth(Gen 10:).**

God created Adam and Eve in the beginning, and Eve is the mother of all living(Gen. 3:20). But after the flood all also trace back to Noah. As Peter noted, only eight souls were saved through water(1Pet. 3:20). Noah and his three sons, along with their wives were the only people to survive the flood(Gen. 3:18-19):

*Now the sons of Noah who went out of the ark were Shem, Ham, and Japheth. And Ham was the father of Canaan. 19 These three were the sons of Noah, and from these the whole earth was populated.*

The final account in Noah's life had a powerful impact on the nations recorded in Genesis 10. In a moment of weakness, Noah became drunk, and the terrible consequences when one is no longer capable of sober judgment occurred. This is reason why drunkenness is a work of the flesh(Gal. 5:19-21). What could never happen while Noah was sober, became possible only because Noah was drunk with wine. While under the influence of alcohol, Noah was lying naked in his tent. The actions of Shem and Japheth reveal how Ham should have responded to his father's nakedness. They went backwards into the tent so they would not see anything(Gen. 9:22-23).

*And Ham, the father of Canaan, saw the nakedness of his father, and told his two brothers outside. 23 But Shem and Japheth took a garment, laid it on both their shoulders, and went backward and covered the nakedness of their father. Their faces were turned away, and they did not see their father's nakedness.*

From the account and its consequences, Ham's initial glimpse had something ungodly attached to it. We don't know exactly what it was, but it led to a terrible curse from Noah that God honored.

*So Noah awoke from his wine, and knew what his younger son had done to him. 25 Then he said: "Cursed be Canaan; A servant of servants He shall be to his brethren." 26 And he said: "Blessed be the Lord, The God of Shem, And may Canaan be his servant. 27 May God enlarge Japheth, And may he dwell in the tents of Shem; And may Canaan be his servant." Gen. 9:24-27*

Because of the godly actions of Shem and Japheth, great blessings were promised to their posterity. But the evil wickedness of Ham brought down a curse upon his posterity. Although many things have been speculated about these blessings and curses on the subsequent history of the human race, they are not based on Scripture. All God revealed is the curse fell on the seven nations of Canaan. Some seek to trace the lineage of the three sons and then make general conclusions. They select events from history to prove their contentions. Yet they often must be selective. Egypt(of Ham) was a world power before it was punished due to its treatment of Israel. Was this actually a part of the curse of Ham? We can assume it was and make generalizations, but nowhere in Scripture does God make such applications. Although it may be true that God cursed all of Ham's posterity, we don't have Scripture to prove it so it is only human speculation. Since secret things belong only to God(Deut. 29:29), we are not wise to follow the lead of others who have made such assumptions. Other than Israel's relationship with the seven nations of Canaan, how the curse might have developed over the rest of Ham's offspring is God's secret.

## **The Tower of Babel**

Chapter Eleven opens with an event that changed the course of human history forever. At that time, the children of Noah's sons were multiplying, but were still together, working as one people. They all spoke the same language and were all moved by the same purpose and goal(Gen. 11:1-4).

*Now the whole earth had one language and one speech. 2 And it came to pass, as they journeyed from the east, that they found a plain in the land of Shinar, and they dwelt there. 3 Then they said to one another, "Come, let us make bricks and bake them thoroughly." They had brick for stone, and they had asphalt for mortar. 4 And they said, "Come, let us build ourselves a city, and a tower whose top is in the heavens; let us make a name for ourselves, lest we be scattered abroad over the face of the whole earth."*

As we carefully read this account, it is difficult to find the exact sin that led God to intervene. Some think it was a violation of the command to "fill the earth." Others, that they sought to build something that manifested their pride. Perhaps they wanted a structure high enough that it could not be impacted by a flood. Yet the best answer seems to be: "we just don't know." When God came down, He identified the problem with these terms: "the people are one," "they all have one language," "this is what they begin to do," and "nothing that they propose to do will be withheld from them." This is the only explanation God gave and it is difficult to identify exactly what sins were being dealt with.

*But the Lord came down to see the city and the tower which the sons of men had built. 6 And the Lord said, "Indeed the people are one and they all have one language, and this is what they begin to do; now nothing that they propose to do will be withheld from them. Gen. 11:5-7*

Yet clearly something in their conduct or purpose led God to intervene and separate them.

*Come, let Us go down and there confuse their language, that they may not understand one another's speech." 8 So the Lord scattered them abroad from there over the face of all the earth, and they ceased building the city. Gen. 11:7-9*

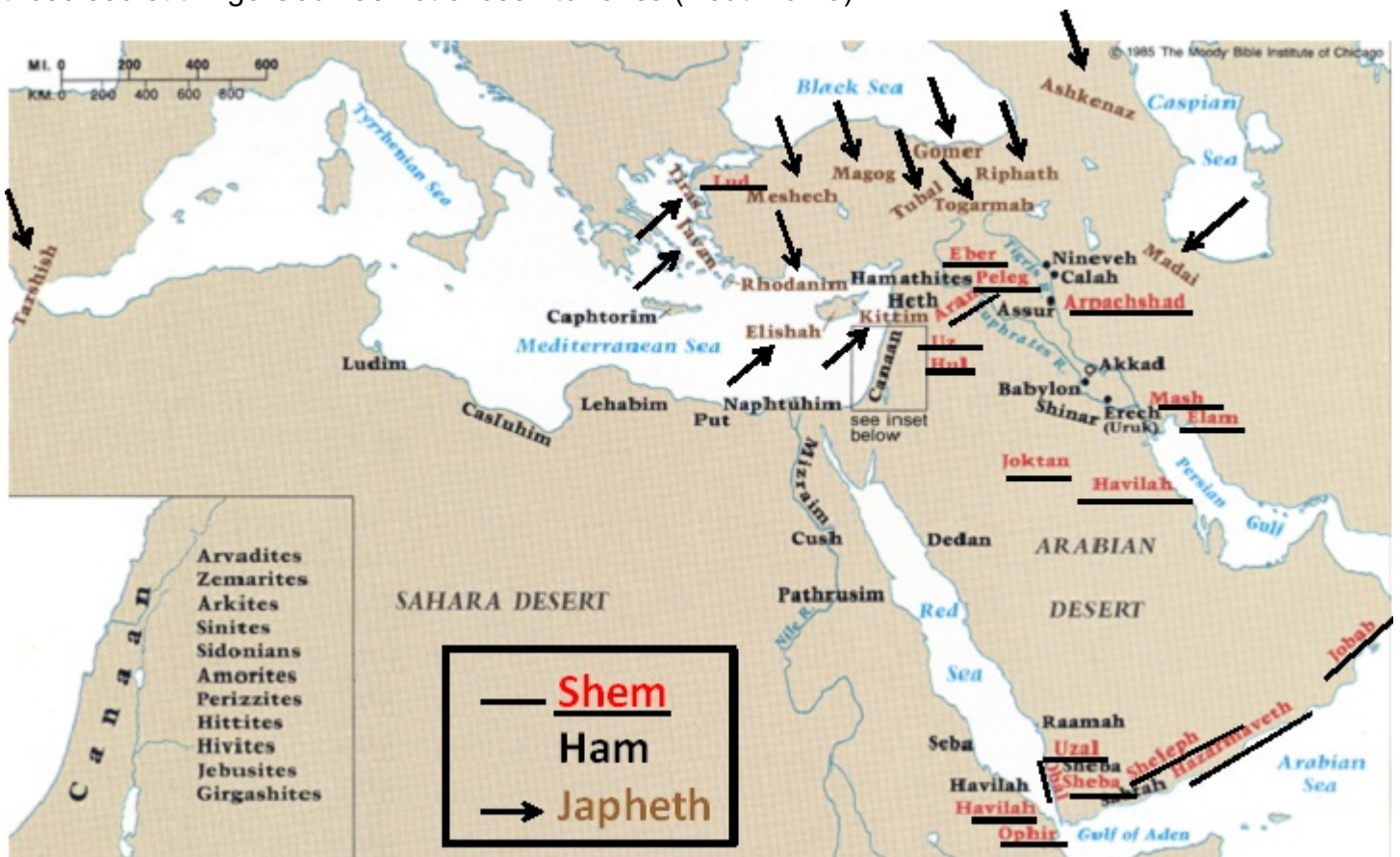
God did two distinct things. First, He confused "their language that they may not understand one another's speech." Second, "the Lord scattered them abroad over the face of all the earth." Once again

we must take these words and seek to fit them into the facts we know. There are nations all over the earth. Many date back 1,000's of years before the birth of Christ. These nations not only speak different languages and live in different locations, but also have different skin color, eye color and facial features. Although all races came from Adam and Eve and again through Noah's three sons, there are many differences between those living in China, Japan, the Middle East, Africa and Europe. Each nation not only lives in a different place and speaks a different language, they also have different appearances.

Did all this happen at this moment? Did God scatter the Chinese, Japanese, Eskimos, Africans, Asians, and Indians, changing their facial and body features, giving them different languages, and putting them in their lands? It makes sense, but can we say with certainty? It is the most natural explanation. That at the tower of Babel, God changed languages, scattered all over the earth, changed skin color and facial features, etc. But all God actually revealed is:

*Therefore its name is called Babel, because there the Lord confused the language of all the earth; and from there the Lord scattered them abroad over the face of all the earth. Gen. 11:9*

The map below gives a general description of the locations where the nations described in Genesis 10 were found. Yet even this map is only the result of taking what's revealed in Scripture, comparing it to what we know from history, and placing them in those locations. Their civilizations date back to this time and some sites have been found and identified. We could do the same with the Chinese, Japanese, Africans and those who settled on the other continents whose civilizations also date back to this time. This map is helpful only because it helps set the stage for the events in the rest of the Old Testament. Since the other continents are not mentioned anywhere in Scripture, we must simply place them into those secret things God has not chosen to reveal (Deut. 29:29).



Japheth (the Arrows) went primarily North and ultimately into Europe. Shem (underlined) primarily centrally located and ultimately East. Ham (bold text) primarily went South and ultimately into Africa.

### God Created and Rules over the Nations

All nations, races and cultures had their beginning with Noah and his three sons. No matter what language we speak or how different we look, we are all the same. Every man has an eternal soul and is created in the image and likeness of God. All men are brothers. First through Adam and Eve and then through Noah and his three sons. Paul spoke of this in a sermon preached in Athens (Acts 17:26-27):

*And He has made from one blood every nation of men to dwell on all the face of the earth, and has determined their preappointed times and the boundaries of their dwellings, 27 so that they should seek the Lord, in the hope that they might grope for Him and find Him, though He is not far from each one of us;*

God made every nation from one blood(Noah). Those who believe that some are less than others are rejecting the truth. God made the nations He separated at Babel, and God has made every nation since. God determined their pre-appointed times and He also determined their boundaries.

God did this with a specific goal and purpose. He worked in all the nations so “*they should seek the Lord.*” He decided when they would begin and when they would end(*pre-appointed times*). He also chose how large and powerful they would become(*boundaries of their dwellings*). God did this so as many men and women as possible would “*grope for Him and find Him.*” Once we grasp this, many of the things written in the Prophets become clearer. We can also understand what is happening in our world today.

God and not man determines when a nation begins and when it ends. God and not man decides how large or small a nation becomes. There is “*no authority*” in existence “*except from God*” and the “*authorities that do exist are appointed by God.*”

*Let every soul be subject to the governing authorities. For there is no authority except from God, and the authorities that exist are appointed by God. 2 Therefore whoever resists the authority resists the ordinance of God, and those who resist will bring judgment on themselves. Rom. 13:1-3*

God has complete control over all nations. “*He rules over the nations*” and “*rules in the kingdom of men.*” He gives the rule and power to whomever He wishes. All of this is done to convert as many as possible, to save as many as possible, to allow as many as possible to find Him.

*For the kingdom is the Lord's, And He rules over the nations. Ps. 22:28*

*'This decision is by the decree of the watchers, And the sentence by the word of the holy ones, In order that the living may know That the Most High rules in the kingdom of men, Gives it to whomever He will, And sets over it the lowest of men.' Dan. 4:17*

From these and many other passages there is no doubt God holds total control over nations. From Babel to the end of time, God decided when a nation would grow and become strong. God decided when a nation would weaken or fall.

### **As each Man, so each Nation is Judged by its Choices**

Yet God, in justice, righteousness, and mercy did not make these decisions without man's free will. Just as our own judgment will be decided by our free will and choices(2Cor. 5:10), so also each nation is also given the same rights and privileges. God's words to Abraham confirm that once a nation is given its land, only their own iniquity and wickedness can forfeit the gift.

*Then He said to Abram: “Know certainly that your descendants will be strangers in a land that is not theirs, and will serve them, and they will afflict them four hundred years. 14 And also the nation whom they serve I will judge; afterward they shall come out with great possessions. 15 Now as for you, you shall go to your fathers in peace; you shall be buried at a good old age. 16 But in the fourth generation they shall return here, for the iniquity of the Amorites is not yet complete.” Gen. 15:13-16*

Though God promised Abraham his children would become a great nation and live in Canaan, it could not be done until it was just and honorable. Those given the land had not yet reached a level of iniquity necessary to be removed. Until that time came, God allowed Egypt to enslave Israel and afflict them. But when the iniquity was *complete* God would both judge and punish Egypt and dispossess Canaan.

God made it very clear what was used to judge Egypt and the seven nations of Canaan. He warned Israel they must not follow “*the doings of Egypt or Canaan.*” The “*ordinances*” of those nations(incest, fornication, adultery, murder of infants, homosexuality, bestiality- Lev 18:6-23) were abominations. The “*land was defiled and vomits*” those practicing these things from its midst. Israel was warned that even they must not do these things “*lest the land vomit you out also when you defile it, as it vomited out the nations that were before you.*” These are universal commands given for all time.

*According to the doings of the land of Egypt, where you dwelt, you shall not do; and according to the doings of the land of Canaan, where I am bringing you, you shall not do; nor shall you walk in their ordinances. 4 You shall observe My judgments and keep My ordinances, to walk in them: I am the Lord your God. 5 You shall therefore keep My statutes and My judgments, which if a man does, he shall live by them: I am the Lord. .... Do not defile yourselves with any of these things; for by all these the nations are defiled, which I am casting out before you. 25 For the land is defiled; therefore I visit the punishment of its iniquity upon it, and the land vomits out its inhabitants. 26 You shall therefore keep My statutes and My judgments, and shall not commit any of these abominations, either any of your own nation or any stranger who dwells among you 27 (for all these abominations the men of the land have done, who were before you, and thus the land is defiled), 28 lest the land vomit you out also when you defile it, as it vomited out the nations that were before you. 29 For whoever commits any of these abominations, the persons who commit them shall be cut off from among their people. Lev. 18:3-5; 24-29*

Beginning with the flood, God revealed there was a level of wickedness and evil that He would not tolerate. Even though God promised He would never destroy **all** mankind again, He has continued to do so on a national basis. When Sodom and Gomorrah reached a level of sin similar to the seven nations of Canaan, God destroyed them and used them as an example for all who would live after(even us)!

*And the Lord said, “Because the outcry against Sodom and Gomorrah is great, and because their sin is very grave,” Gen. 18:20-21*

*as Sodom and Gomorrah, and the cities around them in a similar manner to these, having given themselves*

over to sexual immorality and gone after strange flesh, are set forth as an example, suffering the vengeance of eternal fire. Jude 7

Any people possessing land have a code of conduct to uphold. The land remains theirs until they violate that code. Then the land vomits them out. This happened again and again in the history of Israel and the nations around them. God used nations(Gentiles) to punish Israel throughout the Judges and Kings. In mercy, He also used plagues, famines, and droughts to lead them to repent before it was too late.

*I gave you cleanness of teeth in all your cities. And lack of bread in all your places; Yet you have not returned to Me, Says the Lord. 7 I also withheld rain from you, When there were still three months to the harvest. I made it rain on one city, I withheld rain from another city... Yet you have not returned to Me... 9 I blasted you with blight and mildew. ... Your vineyards, Your fig trees, And your olive trees, The locust devoured them; Yet you have not returned to Me, ... 10 I sent among you a plague after the manner of Egypt; ... Yet you have not returned to Me, ... 11 I overthrew some of you, As God overthrew Sodom and Gomorrah ... Yet you have not returned to Me, ... 12 Therefore thus will I do to you, O Israel; Because I will do this to you, Prepare to meet your God, O Israel! Amos 4:6-12*

He finally used Assyria to destroy the ten tribes and Babylon to destroy Jerusalem and take Israel captive for seventy years.

God sent Jonah to Nineveh to warn them to repent or the land would vomit them out. After repentance God relented. God revealed to Nebuchadnezzar in a dream that after Babylon reached that level of iniquity, the Medo-Persians would conquer and replace, then came Greece, and finally Rome(Dan. 2:36-43; 8:20-22;). God summed all this up for Jeremiah and for us at the potter's wheel(Jer. 18:1-10):

*The word which came to Jeremiah from the Lord, saying: 2 "Arise and go down to the potter's house, and there I will cause you to hear My words." 3 Then I went down to the potter's house, and there he was, making something at the wheel. 4 And the vessel that he made of clay was marred in the hand of the potter; so he made it again into another vessel, as it seemed good to the potter to make. 5 Then the word of the Lord came to me, saying: 6 "O house of Israel, can I not do with you as this potter?" says the Lord. "Look, as the clay is in the potter's hand, so are you in My hand, O house of Israel! 7 The instant I speak concerning a nation and concerning a kingdom, to pluck up, to pull down, and to destroy it, 8 if that nation against whom I have spoken turns from its evil, I will relent of the disaster that I thought to bring upon it. 9 And the instant I speak concerning a nation and concerning a kingdom, to build and to plant it, 10 if it does evil in My sight so that it does not obey My voice, then I will relent concerning the good with which I said I would benefit it.*

## **Conclusion**

God rules in the kingdoms of men and gives authority and power to whomever He wills. Jesus is now ruling over all nations with a rod of iron(Ps. 2:1-9; Rev. 2:27; 12:5; 19:5). From the beginning until the end, nothing has changed. God "made from one blood every nation of men to dwell on all the face of the earth, and has determined their preappointed times and the boundaries of their dwellings." So it was then and so it is today. The reasons the land vomited out the Canaanites in the days of Joshua, and vomited Israel/Judah in the days of Assyria and Babylon are still causing the land to vomit out inhabitants today! The principles of the "handwriting on the wall" that God showed the king of Babylon are still true today.

*5 In the same hour the fingers of a man's hand appeared and wrote opposite the lampstand on the plaster of the wall of the king's palace; and the king saw the part of the hand that wrote. ... 24 Then the fingers of the hand were sent from Him, and this writing was written. 25 "And this is the inscription that was written: MENE, MENE, TEKEL, UPHARSIN. 26 This is the interpretation of each word. Mene: God has numbered your kingdom, and finished it; 27 Tekel: You have been weighed in the balances, and found wanting; 28 Peres: Your kingdom has been divided, and given to the Medes and Persians." Dan. 5:5, 24-29*

All nations days are numbered based on their conduct. They are always being weighed in the balance revealed in Leviticus. When the iniquity is full, a kingdom will be divided and the land will vomit out its people. Think of the words of Habakkuk and how they resemble our own feelings today.

*O Lord, how long shall I cry, And You will not hear? Even cry out to You, "Violence!" And You will not save. 3 Why do You show me iniquity, And cause me to see trouble? For plundering and violence are before me; There is strife, and contention arises. 4 Therefore the law is powerless, And justice never goes forth. For the wicked surround the righteous; Therefore perverse judgment proceeds. Hab. 1:2-4*

God's answer should make us sober and reflective. He was raising up Babylon to remove Israel.

*Look among the nations and watch — Be utterly astounded! For I will work a work in your days Which you would not believe, though it were told you. 6 For indeed I am raising up the Chaldeans, A bitter and hasty nation Which marches through the breadth of the earth, To possess dwelling places that are not theirs. 7 They are terrible and dreadful; Their judgment and their dignity proceed from themselves. Hab. 1:5-7*

Today the world is rapidly changing. We don't know how God is working today. Yet God still rules in the kingdoms of men. Many nations are doing more and more of the things listed in Leviticus. As the iniquity of the Amorites, so their iniquity grows, and judgment draws nearer. No one knows what is to come, but God gave Habakkuk the answer we need today. When Babylon conquered Judah, they were proud, wicked and cruel in what they did. Even Habakkuk could not understand how God could remain "silent while the wicked swallow up those more righteous than themselves" (Hab. 1:13). God's answer was simple. The just must live by faith and trust God completely even when they don't understand.

*"Behold the proud, His soul is not upright in him; But the just shall live by his faith." Hab. 2:4; Heb. 10:37-39*