

NOAH'S DESCENDANTS

Genesis 10:1--11:9

The fourth section of Genesis begins with the first verse of chapter 10. It is the story of the generations of the sons of Noah. Chapter 10 consists of the ethnic table which is divided into three sub-sections. In chapters 10 and 11 we have the historical links which connect for us the time of Noah with the days of Abraham.

These chapters should be read together. The former chapter declares the fact of the division of the nations and answers the question, How? and the latter reveals the cause of the division and answers the question, Why? Without these two chapters and the genealogies which they contain, we should be quite unable to trace the fulfilment of Noah's wonderful prophecy; we should be without any satisfactory solution to the ethnological problem presented by the variety and number of the different nations and tongues; and, we should be left in ignorance concerning the human cause for God abandoning His dealing with the nations and singling out Abram to be the father of His chosen people, Israel.

These two chapters give us the history of the world following the flood. They show us the ways of men in this new world--in revolt against God and seeking to glorify and deify themselves. They set before us principles and judgments upon which this world is founded.

In Genesis 10:1 the sons of Noah are mentioned in the familiar order, Shem, Ham and Japheth, but in the remainder of the chapter his descendants are taken in the opposite order, Japheth, Ham and Shem. This table of 70 nations associates 14 names with Japheth, 30 with Ham and 26 with Shem.

I. The Generations Of Japheth. Genesis 10:2-5.

It is unnecessary and perhaps impossible to identify the names with subsequent races and countries, but attention should certainly be concentrated on verse 5 with its reference to Gentiles. Viewed from the standpoint of the Jews, it is clear that the Gentile nations arose from Japheth. This early reference to "the nations" is very significant and shows that amid all the Jewish exclusiveness the Old Testament never loses sight of the great fact of universality and God's purposes for all the world. It was the crowning sin of the Jews in later ages that they forgot this and concentrated attention upon themselves as the chosen people of God stopping short of the great truth of their revealed religion that they were chosen only for the purpose of being the instrument and channel of God's mercy and grace to "the nations" of the whole earth. Even today there is a great deal of ignorance among Christian people as to the note of universality that is sounded so often in the Old Testament.

II. The Generations Of Ham. Genesis 10:6-20.

The first thing that stands out with prominence in regard to the family of Ham is the reference to Nimrod. Nimrod represented a revival of the spirit of independence and rebellion with its disregard of God and His authority. He struggled for the pre-eminence and by mere force of will obtained it. He was proud and ambitious. He was a thirsty, proud, haughty, defiant, mighty, powerful and conquering man. It was under his rulership and domination that idolatry was

introduced and became the predominant religion. In Babylon--the type of world civilization--the law of association is mechanical centralization; the spirit is independence and rebellion against God's government; the aim is self-interest and self-glorification; the cult is materialism or idolatry; the method is autocracy and monopoly; the unifying bond is fear; the end is confusion.

III. The Generations Of Shem. Genesis 10:21-31.

There came in the line of Shem a man called Eber, and he was one of the forefathers of Abraham, and Abraham became the father of the Hebrews. He was not the first Hebrew, but he was the first who was called a Hebrew.

From this chapter we learn that all nations are of one blood, that all nations have one need and that there is only one way of salvation.

When God divided the earth among the sons of Noah, He commanded them to "go forth and replenish it." In obedience to that command they journeyed toward the west. As they journeyed they came to the plains of Shinar, or Babylonia, and settled there. Over a long period they multiplied greatly. Why should they leave this fertile plain? They were prosperous and contented. They reasoned something like this, "If we spread all over the face of the earth, we won't accomplish anything. Let's stay here, where we can have pleasant associations and wonderful protection."

God's purpose was that of scattering the people, in order that the whole earth might be replenished. It was a case of scattering people for enlargement. God's purpose was not acceptable to the people. It was their purpose to frustrate the will of God by staying together.

Their program was that of a united effort looking to the establishment of unity. "And they said one to another, Go to, let us make brick, and burn them thoroughly. And they had brick for stone, and slime had they for mortar. And they said, Go to, let us build us a city and a tower, whose top may reach unto heaven; and let us make us a name, lest we be scattered abroad upon the face of the whole earth."

A little knowledge had caused them to become conceited. A small accession of power had made them arrogant. They encouraged one another to help build a city and a tower for their habitation and protection. Their desire to "build a city and a tower, whose top may reach unto heaven" had its origin in their deliberate, determined and enthusiastic hostility to the divine purpose. One of their objects in building the city was that they should be self-contained and self-sufficient. They made the tragic mistake of leaving God out of their reckoning. In proposing to build a tower high enough to reach to heaven they were attempting the impossible.

Since the plain of Shinar did not afford any stones, they decided to dig clay and make bricks for the job. They supplemented their inventiveness with thoroughness. They believed in doing a thorough job. When they had manufactured the brick, they adapted themselves to their circumstances and surroundings by making use of the materials which were at hand. Instead of using mortar, they used slime or bitumen, which was a kind of pitch that was plentiful in that area.

The principle, which was underlying the purpose of unity and the program of unification, was that of the glorification of man. They said, "Let us make us a name." They had an inordinate desire for fame. They believed that the building of the city and the construction of the tower would immortalize them. It was terrible to build the tower of Babel in disobedience to God, and it was even worse for them to make it the symbol of self-glorification. When any system glorifies humanity and makes man everything, it is not long before it minimizes God and makes Him nothing. God did not like it when they sought to build in order to glorify man. Those early city planners said, "Let us make us a name"; and they did, but it was not the sort of name that anyone would care to have preserved. Name-making is a common and popular business, but it never pays well in the end.

Vitally concerned with the divine glory, God said, "Let us go down, and there confound their language, that they may not understand one another's speech." This confusion of tongues at Babel came as a curse upon man for trying to be independent of God. Up to this time everybody spoke the same language. That day there was an effectual stay of proceedings. Determined to defeat their plans, God came down and confounded their language. When the place was filled with confused voices, the perplexed workmen "left off to build." Thus, the most prosperous looking undertakings often terminate in miserable failure.

In spite of their unsurpassed ambition, purposeful plans and dynamic energy, they failed ingloriously. But, why did they fail?

1. They left God out of their plans.

It is impossible for anybody to succeed if God is left out of his or her plans. If people ignore God, they are doomed to miserable defeat and shameful failure. It is folly to plan and hope for success if we leave God out of our plans, because He has all forces at His command, He has set a limit to every man's life and He has positioned Himself against those who dishonor His name.

2. They were actuated by selfish motives.

(1) To live for self is to sin against self.

He who lives for self does not have much for which to live. The selfish life is fore-doomed to defeat.

(2) To live for self is to sin against others.

This is even more tragic.

(3) To live for self is to sin against God.

No self-centered soul has ever won the approval of Christ. If we would succeed, we must be willing to conform to the will of Christ for us.

3. They defied the will of God for their lives.

God commanded them to scatter abroad, to multiply and to replenish the earth, but they deliberately refused to do so. Since the beginning of time, no soul has ever succeeded who refused to do the will of God. The one and only way to avoid failure and to insure success in life is to discover and to do the will of God. Do you love Him enough to do His will?