

GENESIS 10

THE TABLE OF NATIONS

Overview

Bible scholar Naomi Steinberg suggested that “Genesis is a book whose plot is genealogy.”¹ As evidence for her conclusion, she observed:

Genesis is divided into ten sections organized by the heading “these are the generations,” i.e., the so-called *toledot* formulae. These sections are arranged into two groups of five: one group for the early ancestors [Moses 3:4; 6:8; Genesis 6:9; and Moses 8:27; Genesis 10:1; 11:10] and the second group of five for the ancestors of Israel (Genesis 11:27; 25:12, 19; 36:1; 37:2). . . .

Genesis constructs the world of the family as individuals who come from a common ancestor and who marry within that kinship group.²

That said, Genesis is more than an account of a succession of generations. Represented to us in the subtle genius of the narrative is a divine purpose guiding the development and differentiation of the families of mankind from beginning to end. From this perspective, according to Genesis scholar Ronald Hendel, all the genealogical records point toward a clear purpose: “the current and future well-being of the people Israel.”³

This focus on Israel is laid out in the Table of Nations, the literary structure that comprises all but the first and last verse of Genesis 10. Although the table includes at least a minimal description for each of the seventy prominent families or individuals portrayed as descending from the three sons of Noah, the generations

1 Naomi A. Steinberg, “The World of the Family in Genesis,” in *The Book of Genesis: Composition, Reception, and Interpretation*, ed. Craig A. Evans, Joel N. Lohr, and David L. Petersen (Leiden, Netherlands: Brill, 2012), 281.

2 Steinberg, “World of the Family in Genesis,” 281–282.

3 Ronald S. Hendel, “Historical Context,” in *Composition, Reception, and Interpretation*, 78.

of Japheth (verses 2–5) and Ham (verses 6–20) are presented only briefly and never reappear in Genesis. Contrastingly, the accounts of Shem’s offspring (verses 21–31)—presented last, as the climax of the genealogies—remain center stage throughout the rest of Genesis because Shem is the ancestor of Israelites.⁴

The spotlight on the descendants of Shem further narrows to shine on the posterity of Eber (or Heber). Eber is the ancestor of the Hebrews. His two sons, Peleg and Joktan, are mentioned in Genesis 10:25, followed by a description of the line of Joktan, the second son of Eber, in verses 26–29. However, it is not until chapter 11, in the account of the Tower of Babel, that we meet the descendants of Peleg and suddenly discover that he is the ancestor of Abram (11:16–26), the patriarch of the family who will carry God’s covenant forward through the end of Genesis and beyond. By arranging the genealogy in this way, “the author draws a dividing line through the descendants of Shem on either side of the city of Babylon. The dividing line falls between the two sons of Eber, that is, Peleg and Joktan. [The line of Joktan] leads to the building of Babylon [while the line of Peleg culminates in] the family of Abraham.”⁵ The reader, thus prepared, can now appreciate the contrast between the folly and destruction of the builders of the Tower of Babel in Genesis 11 and the fulfillment of God’s purposes in the raising up and separating from them the descendants of the righteous Abraham (chapters 12–50).

Through the beautifully constructed account of Genesis 10, the reader is also prepared to understand the blessings and responsibilities of the posterity of Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob:

The number seventy [corresponding to the number of the descendants of Noah in the Table of Nations] resonates with the composition of the offspring of Jacob who went down to Egypt. The special significance this assumes is demonstrated not only by its emphasis in Genesis 46:27 but also by its reiteration twice more, in Exodus 1:5 and Deuteronomy 10:22. It is as though the totality of the nations and the totality of the Israelites who migrate to Egypt are intertwined. . . . It is not coincidental that God’s first communication to the patriarch Abraham immediately places his offspring in a worldwide context: “All the families of the earth shall bless themselves by you” (Genesis 18:18; 22:18).⁶

Echoes of the symbolic number seventy resonate throughout scripture down to our era in the structure of the presiding quorums of the Church. To understand this, some additional descriptions of the ancient background for this idea are required. In what Jeffrey Tigay called one of the two “most significant variant

4 Umberto Cassuto, *A Commentary on the Book of Genesis*. vol. 2, *From Noah to Abraham*, trans. Israel Abrahams (Jerusalem: Magnes Press, 1997), 198.

5 John H. Sailhamer, “Genesis,” in *The Expositor’s Bible Commentary*, ed. Frank E. Gaebelein (Grand Rapids, MI: Zondervan, 1990), 102.

6 Nahum M. Sarna, *Genesis: The Traditional Hebrew Text with the New JPS Translation Commentary*, The JPS Torah Commentary, ed. Nahum M. Sarna and Chaim Potok (Philadelphia, PA: Jewish Publication Society, 1989), 69–70. See also Sailhamer, “Genesis,” 98.

readings found in the Qumran scrolls and the *Septuagint* of Deuteronomy,⁷ we are told about the responsibility for the seventy nations that are allotted to seventy members of the heavenly council: “When the Most High divided the gentiles, when He scattered the sons of Adam, He set the boundaries of the gentiles according to the number of the sons of God.”⁸

The sense here is that each member of the divine council had duties for one of these nations and, as explained in Deuteronomy 32:9–16, that the children of Israel are the special charge of the son of the Most High God, Yahweh.⁹

In accordance with the principle “in earth, as it is in heaven” (Matthew 6:10), priesthood groups corresponding to the symbolic number of seventy have been organized from time to time. For example, Moses gathered seventy elders to help him “bear the burden of the people,”¹⁰ and Jesus chose seventy disciples to help preach the gospel to the gentiles. Regarding the pattern as it has been implemented in the Restoration, BYU professor S. Kent Brown wrote:

In modern scripture [the link between the Quorums of the Seventy and the Gentiles] is made absolutely clear. From this source we learn that “the Seventy are also called to preach the gospel, and to be especial witnesses unto the gentiles and in all the world” (Doctrine and Covenants 107:25). Thus the tie is made and makes plain that the seventy’s modern mission is directed primarily toward the gentile nations, which were seventy in number according to the Hebrew manuscripts of Genesis 10. . . .

[It is] clear why Jesus chose two sets of disciples, the Twelve and the Seventy. The Twelve bore an obvious relation to the tribes of Israel, the Seventy to the gentile nations of the earth as well as to an inner structural entity that existed within the tribal system of preexilic Israel. Because of its numerical link to Genesis 10, the

7 Jeffrey H. Tigay, *Deuteronomy*, The JPS Torah Commentary, ed. Nahum M. Sarna and Chaim Potok (Philadelphia, PA: The Jewish Publication Society, 1996), 513.

8 Deuteronomy 32:8. This reading, which differs from the traditional text on which the King James Version is translated, is attested in the Dead Sea Scrolls (Martin Abegg Jr., Peter Flint, and Eugene Ulrich, eds., *The Dead Sea Scrolls Bible* [New York City, NY: Harper, 1999], 191); the Septuagint (Cécile Dogniez and Marguerite Harl, eds., *Le Pentateuque d’Alexandrie: texte grec et traduction* [Paris, France: Cerf, 2001], 845); and the Samaritan Pentateuch (Benyamim Tsedaka and Sharon Sullivan, eds., *The Israelite Samaritan Version of the Torah*, trans. Benyamim Tsedaka [Grand Rapids, MI: Eerdmans, 2013], 482). Also of note is that “gentiles” here is the Hebrew *goyyim*, which is often translated as the more general English word “nations.” Additionally, Gordon J. Wenham, *Genesis 1–15*, Word Biblical Commentary 1 (Waco, TX: Word Books, 1987), 213, observed that the god El and his consort “Asherah had seventy sons according to Canaanite tradition, and so did Jacob (Genesis 46:27; Deuteronomy 10:22), Gideon (Judges 8:30), and Ahab (2 Kings 10:1).”

9 Psalm 82 paints a picture of a similar divine council, where the lesser gods, “the sons of the Most High” (Psalm 82:6), are called to account because of their failure to care for the poor, the orphan, and the widow. The final verse may hint that Yahweh will supplant the gods of other nations. For an overview of the context of this psalm and a Canaanite parallel, see William L. Holladay, *The Psalms through Three Thousand Years: Prayerbook of a Cloud of Witnesses* (Minneapolis, MN: Fortress Press, 1996), 22.

10 Numbers 11:16–17. See also Exodus 24:1. Jewish readers traditionally see this as the precedent for councils of elders called Sanhedrin, of which the Great Sanhedrin at Jerusalem was the highest ruling body (John A. Tvedtnes, *The Church of the Old Testament* [Salt Lake City, UT: Deseret Book, 1967], 36).

figure seventy itself, when applied to Jesus' disciples, anticipated that the gospel message would be taken to the gentile nations after his ministry. In our own time, the Seventies have been given by the Lord the monumental, yet distinctive, task of bearing the gospel to the gentile nations of the world, "thus differing from other officers in the church in the duties of their calling" (Doctrine and Covenants 107:25).¹¹

In summary, the significance of the seventy descendants listed in the Table of Nations is not confined to the story of Genesis. It persists today, informing the symbolism of the way in which the gathering of Israel is led and organized among us. In that gathering, each inhabitant of the "seventy" nations of the earth is lovingly invited to become one with the twelve tribes of Israel by accepting the ordinances and covenants of the gospel of Abraham.

Source

Genesis Minute by Jeffrey M. Bradshaw, adapted from Jeffrey M. Bradshaw and David J. Larsen, *In God's Image and Likeness 2: Enoch, Noah, and the Tower of Babel*, 2 vols. (Orem, UT: Interpreter Foundation; Salt Lake City, UT: Eborn Books, 2014), 339–353.

Related verses

Genesis 10

Genesis 10:1–5. The Generations of Japheth

10:2. "*the sons of Japheth.*" The name Japheth is similar to that of the Titan Iapetos, son of Ouranos and Gaia and father of Atlas, Prometheus, and Epimetheus in Greek mythology.¹² In the Table of Nations, Japheth's descendants "make up the geographical horizon of the article, the outer fringe of the known world, a kind of 'third world' over against the nations of Ham (Canaan) and Shem."¹³ "These include peoples in the Mediterranean area (Dodanim, Elishah, Kittim), peoples in Asia Minor (Magog, Tubal, Meshech, Tiras, Togarmah), and others around the Black Sea and Caspian Sea"—"Cimmerians (Gomer), Scythians (Ashkenaz), Medes (Madai), and Paphlagonians (Riphath)."¹⁴

11 S. Kent Brown, "The Seventy in Scripture," in *By Study and Also by Faith: Essays in Honor of Hugh W. Nibley*, ed. John M. Lundquist and Stephen D. Ricks, 2 vols. (Salt Lake City, UT: Deseret Book, 1990), 1:38–39. The missionary efforts of the Twelve and Seventy (described in Doctrine and Covenants 110:12 as the "dispensation of the gospel of Abraham") are part of the commission of Abraham's seed to bless all nations of the earth (3 Nephi 20:25–27).

12 Claus Westermann, ed., *Genesis 1–11: A Continental Commentary*, trans. John J. Scullion (Minneapolis, MN: Fortress Press, 1994), 504.

13 John H. Sailhamer, "Genesis," in *The Expositor's Bible Commentary*, ed. Frank E. Gaebelein (Grand Rapids, MI: Zondervan, 1990), 99–100.

14 John H. Walton, "Genesis," in *Genesis, Exodus, Leviticus, Numbers, Deuteronomy*, ed. John H. Walton (Grand Rapids, MI: Zondervan, 2009), 57.

Isaiah referred to these nations to show that God’s plan includes all humankind, even to the farthest reaches of the world: “He shall have dominion also from sea to sea. . . . The kings of Tarshish and of the isles shall bring presents” (Psalm 72:8, 10).¹⁵

10:5. “*in their nations.*” According to Umberto Cassuto, the thrust of the verse is to show that “there were many other nations in the world who traced their descent to Japheth, but there was no need to detail their names. Similar expressions are subsequently used with reference to the sons of Ham (v. 20), the sons of Shem (v. 31), and the sons of Noah as a whole (v. 32). [Genesis] was concerned only to complete the number of seventy names, and to incorporate therein the names of the principal nations that were near to Israel, or were in some way connected with the Israelites, or were in some manner known to them.”¹⁶

Source

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Related verses

Genesis 10:1–5

Genesis 10:6–7. The Generations of Ham

10:6. “*the sons of Ham.*” “As the Japhethites stretch east and west across the northern latitudes, Ham’s descendants line the southern coast of the Mediterranean and both sides of the Red Sea. Through the ‘Canaanites’ this line also extends partway up the eastern coast of the Mediterranean.”¹⁷

The author begins by listing Ham’s four sons: Cush, Mizraim, Phut, and Canaan (verse 6). Then, like Japheth’s list, he gives the sons of the firstborn (Cush): Seba, Havilah, Sabtah, Raamah, and Saptetcha (verse 7). However, before going on to the next son (Mizraim), he lists the sons of Raamah: Sheba and Dedan (verse 7). These descendants, when the names of Cush and Raamah are included, number fourteen—again the completeness of the list is fulfilled in the number seven.¹⁸

¹⁵ Sailhamer, “Genesis,” 99–100.

¹⁶ Umberto Cassuto, *A Commentary on the Book of Genesis*, vol. 2, *From Noah to Abraham*, trans. Israel Abrahams (Jerusalem, Israel: Magnes Press, 1997), 180.

¹⁷ John H. Walton, “Genesis,” in *Genesis, Exodus, Leviticus, Numbers, Deuteronomy*, ed. John H. Walton (Grand Rapids, MI: Zondervan, 2009), 57.

¹⁸ John H. Sailhamer, “Genesis,” in *The Expositor’s Bible Commentary*, ed. Frank E. Gaebelein (Grand Rapids, MI: Zondervan, 1990), 100.

10:6. “Cush.” Gordon J. Wenham cited the traditional translation of Cush as “Ethiopia” (following the Septuagint)¹⁹ but surmised rather that it “probably covers a variety of dark-skinned tribes (compare Jeremiah 13:23) living beyond the southern border of Egypt.”²⁰

10:6. “Mizraim.” This is the Hebrew term for Egypt. Egypt is called the “land of Ham” in Psalms 78:51; 105:23; 105:23, 27; 106:21, 22.²¹ 

10:6. “Phut.” See Jeremiah 46:9; Ezekiel 27:10; 30:5; 38:5, where the term is usually translated as “Ethiopia” and “Ethiopians.” Libya and Phut are associated as allies of Egypt in Nahum 3:9.²²

10:6. “Canaan.” The geographic boundaries of Canaan are given in Genesis 10:19. Victor Hamilton commented, “Possibly Canaan is linked with the likes of Egypt and Babylon in this unit (and all under the rubric of Hamites) because like them Canaan was, from the Bible’s perspective, a sedentary population, dwelling in cities ‘which are great and walled up to heaven’ (Deuteronomy 1:28). Thus, the reason for listing Canaan as Hamitic is not personal or geographical but sociocultural.”²³

Source

Genesis Minute by Jeffrey M. Bradshaw, adapted from Jeffrey M. Bradshaw and David J. Larsen, *In God’s Image and Likeness 2: Enoch, Noah, and the Tower of Babel*, 2 vols. (Orem, UT: Interpreter Foundation; Salt Lake City, UT: Eborn Books, 2014), 358–360.

Related verses

Genesis 10:6–7

Genesis 10:8–10. Nimrod and Babel

10:8. “Nimrod.” “Possibly the verse does not imply that this person was a direct offspring of Cush and his wife, but [rather] that he belonged to one of the peoples known as the ‘sons’ of Cush.”²⁴ Richard S. Hess

¹⁹ In Genesis 10:6–8, though, it is transliterated as “Cush.” See John William Wevers, *Notes on the Greek Text of Genesis* (Atlanta, GA: Scholars Press, 1993), 28, 130.

²⁰ Gordon J. Wenham, *Genesis 1–15*, Word Biblical Commentary 1 (Waco, TX: Word Books, 1987), 221.

²¹ Claus Westermann, *Genesis 1–11: A Continental Commentary*, trans. John J. Scullion (Minneapolis, MN: Fortress Press, 1994), 510.

²² Wenham, *Genesis 1–15*, 221.

²³ Victor P. Hamilton, *The Book of Genesis: Chapters 1–17* (Grand Rapids, MI: Eerdmans, 1990), 336.

²⁴ Umberto Cassuto, *A Commentary on the Book of Genesis*, vol. 2, *From Noah to Abraham*, trans. Israel Abrahams (Jerusalem, Israel: Magnes Press, 1997), 200.

concluded that “the Hebrew association of the name with the root *mrd* [Hebrew ‘revolt’ or ‘rebellion’] suggests a relationship with the rebellion of Genesis 11 and forms the primary tie between the Table of Nations and [the story of the Tower of Babel].”²⁵ Alternatively, Victor Hamilton noted the “Ugaritic name *ni-mi-ri-ya*” (which he translated “panther of Yah”). This led him to suggest that Nimrod means “‘panther of Hadd’ (i.e., Baal), analogous to *nqmd* (‘victory of Hadd’).”²⁶

10:8. “*he began to be a mighty one in the earth.*” Robert Alter noted that this phrase “uses the same idiom that is invoked for Noah’s planting a vineyard (9:20). The implication, then, is that Nimrod, too, was the founder of an archetypal human occupation. The next verse suggests that this occupation is that of hunter, with his founding of a great Mesopotamian empire then introduced in Genesis 10:10–12.”²⁷

10:8. “*mighty one.*” This is the Hebrew *gibbor*, which means “mighty warrior.” This reference ties the passage back to the story of Noah and forward to the Joseph Smith Translation description of Peleg and the aspirations of the builders of the Tower of Babel in Genesis 11.²⁸ In the current context, Nimrod’s title refers to the exploits that established him as a king of Babylon (Genesis 10:10).

10:9. “*a mighty hunter.*” Hebrew *gibbor tsayid* translates to “mighty warrior of the hunt.” Compare Ether 2:1. “Perhaps his prowess as a hunter is put forth as evidence of the martial prowess that enabled him to conquer kingdoms, since the two skills are often associated in the ruling classes of older civilizations. Numerous Neo-Assyrian bas-reliefs depict royal lion hunts or royal bull hunts.”²⁹

10:8. “*before the Lord.*” Both instances of this phrase in the Joseph Smith Translation are modified to read “*in the land,*”³⁰ thus eliminating any hint of divine sanction for Nimrod’s hunting.

10:10. “*Babel.*” This reference to Babel or Babylon is meant to introduce the reader to the city of Babylon, which will be the subject of Genesis 11, and which will serve as a type of wickedness throughout the rest of the Bible.³¹ For example, in Isaiah chapters 13–14, Assyria is identified with Babylon, and in Revelation 17:5, we read of the idolatrous image of “mystery, Babylon the Great.”

25 Richard S. Hess, *Studies in the Personal Names of Genesis 1–11* (Winona Lake, IN: Eisenbrauns, 2009), 144. See also *Babylonian Talmud, hag. 13a; Pesachim 94b.*

26 Victor P. Hamilton, *The Book of Genesis: Chapters 1–17* (Grand Rapids, MI: Eerdmans, 1990), 338.

27 Robert Alter, ed., *The Five Books of Moses: A Translation with Commentary* (New York City, NY: W. W. Norton, 2004), 55.

28 See Genesis 6:4; Moses 8:21; and commentary on Genesis 10:25.

29 Alter, *Five Books of Moses*, 55.

30 Scott H. Faulring, Kent P. Jackson, and Robert J. Matthews, eds., *Joseph Smith’s New Translation of the Bible: Original Manuscripts* (Provo, UT: Religious Studies Center, Brigham Young University, 2004), 118, 632.

31 John H. Sailhamer, “Genesis,” in *The Expositor’s Bible Commentary*, ed. Frank E. Gaebelein (Grand Rapids, MI: Zondervan, 1990), 100–101.

“Babylon was situated on the River Euphrates about fifty miles south of modern Baghdad, Iraq.”³² “The oldest Sumerian name for the city was *ka-dinir-ra*, which was understood to mean ‘the gate of God.’ It was translated into Akkadian as *bab-il*. According to *Enuma Elish*, the Mesopotamian creation epic, the gods themselves built the temple there for the god Marduk at the beginning of time.”³³

During the First Dynasty of Babylon, “the predecessors to Hammurabi made it their capital. From that time on, it became legendary as the seat of culture and religion in Mesopotamia. Archaeologically, excavations can only recover data as far back as the First Dynasty of Babylon because the water table shifted and destroyed all earlier layers. We therefore know nothing of the history of Babylon’s founding from either literary or archaeological records.”³⁴

10:10. “Erech.” “This is the Hebrew spelling for the great ancient city of Uruk [now Warka], the largest city of the third millennium (six miles in circumference) and the home of Gilgamesh.”³⁵

10:10. “Accad.” “This city, called *agade* in Sumerian, became the center of the kingdom of Akkad founded by the famous Sargon (ca. 2300 BCE), who established a dynasty that lasted about 150 years. . . . Eventually its name came to embrace the whole of northern Babylonia as opposed to Sumer in the south.”³⁶

10:10. “Shinar.” “The land of Babylonia, embracing Sumer and Akkad and bounded on the north by Assyria, modern southern Iraq.”³⁷ Note that Shinar and Babel, here mentioned in connection with Nimrod, figure as the two prominent place names in Genesis 11:1–9.

Source

Genesis Minute by Jeffrey M. Bradshaw, adapted from Jeffrey M. Bradshaw and David J. Larsen, *In God’s Image and Likeness 2: Enoch, Noah, and the Tower of Babel*, 2 vols. (Orem, UT: Interpreter Foundation; Salt Lake City, UT: Eborn Books, 2014), 360–363.

32 Sailhamer, “Genesis,” 100–101.

33 Stephanie Dalley, “The Epic of Creation,” in *Myths from Mesopotamia: Creation, the Flood, Gilgamesh, and Others*, ed. Stephanie Dalley (Oxford, England: Oxford University Press, 2000). For a detailed discussion of this episode and its biblical affinities, see Jeffrey M. Bradshaw and Ronan J. Head, “The Investiture Panel at Mari and Rituals of Divine Kingship in the Ancient Near East,” *Studies in the Bible and Antiquity* 4 (2012): 1–42.

34 John H. Walton, “Genesis,” in *Genesis, Exodus, Leviticus, Numbers, Deuteronomy*, ed. John H. Walton (Grand Rapids, MI: Zondervan, 2009), 59.

35 Nahum M. Sarna, *Genesis: The Traditional Hebrew Text with the New JPS Translation Commentary*, The JPS Torah Commentary, ed. Nahum M. Sarna and Chaim Potok (Philadelphia, PA: Jewish Publication Society, 1989), 74.

36 Sarna, *Genesis*, 74.

37 Sarna, *Genesis*, 74.

Related verses

Genesis 10:8–10

Genesis 10:11–20. The Generations of Ham (*continued*)

10:11. “*Nineveh.*” “Excavations at Nineveh (contiguous with modern Mosul in northern Iraq) indicate that the site was settled in prehistoric times.”³⁸

10:11. “*the same is a great city.*” Though it is more grammatically natural to apply this description to Calah, most commentators see it instead as an epithet for Nineveh, consistent with the description’s use in Jonah 1:2; 3:2–3; 4:11.³⁹ Excavations have confirmed Nineveh’s impressive size.

10:15. “*Sidon his firstborn.*” “The famous Phoenician port city”⁴⁰ of Sidon and its sister city of Tyre are metaphorically described as the children of Canaan. The metaphor is fitting because in Genesis, we often see the second son eventually take preeminence over the firstborn son (for example, Cain and Abel, Ishmael and Isaac, Esau and Jacob, Manasseh and Ephraim). In this case, though Sidon was the “firstborn” (that is, the older of the two leading cities of Phoenicia), it was overtaken by Tyre in prominence by the tenth century BC.

10:15. “*Heth.*” “Undoubtedly, Heth is taken here to be a personal name, that of the ancestor of the Hittites.”⁴¹

10:16. “*the Jebusite.*” Genesis scholar Sarna commented, “Nothing is known about the origins or history of this people. At the time of the Exodus, they lived in the hill country, according to Numbers 13:29. In the period of Joshua’s wars of conquest, and until David’s time (2 Samuel 5:6–8), they were located more specifically in Jerusalem (see, for example, Joshua 15:8; 18:28; Judges 1:21). In fact, Jerusalem itself was called Jebus (Judges 19:10), and it was from Araunah the Jebusite that David bought the plot of land on which the Temple was later built (2 Samuel 24:15–25).”⁴²

10:16. “*the Amorite.*” The Amorites “appear as a distinct ethnic group in all the lists of the pre-Israelite peoples of the land. In the course of time, the term lost all ethnic significance in the Bible and, like ‘Canaanite,’

38 Nahum M. Sarna, *Genesis: The Traditional Hebrew Text with the New JPS Translation Commentary*, The JPS Torah Commentary, ed. Nahum M. Sarna and Chaim Potok (Philadelphia, PA: Jewish Publication Society, 1989), 59.

39 Sarna, *Genesis*, 75.

40 Sarna, *Genesis*, 75–76.

41 Sarna, *Genesis*, 76.

42 Sarna, *Genesis*, 76.

came to be employed as a general designation for them all, as for instance in Genesis 15:16. The Amurru, as they were called in Akkadian, were a West Semitic people who first appeared in Babylonia in significant numbers about 2000 BCE, having migrated from the fringes of the Syrian desert. In subsequent centuries, successive waves of Amorites infiltrated the entire Fertile Crescent.”⁴³ Bible scholar Gordon J. Wenham noted that some of the most famous dynasties of Babylon—Mari and Ashur—were of Amorite descent.⁴⁴ Moreover, Old Testament scholar Ronald Hendel, among other scholars, understands Deuteronomy 26:5, “A Syrian ready to perish was my father,” to refer to Abraham’s origins as an Amorite.⁴⁵

10:19. “*the border of the Canaanites was from Sidon, as thou comest to Gerar.*” The relatively extensive description of Canaan in this verse merits explanation:

[In Genesis 10:19, the] Table of Nations displays [an] exceptional interest in the territorial boundaries of Canaan because it is leading up to the progenitors of Abraham, whose descendants are to inherit the land. Significantly, the city-states north of Sidon, detailed in verses 17–18 are excluded, and only the region west of the Jordan is included. Sidon constitutes the extreme northern limit; Gaza represents the southwestern extremity, and then the border extends westward across the low hill country to the Dead Sea region.⁴⁶

10:20. “*after their tongues.*” Joseph Smith Translation OT1 and OT2 both render this phrase as “after *the same tongue.*”⁴⁷

Source

Genesis Minute by Jeffrey M. Bradshaw, adapted from Jeffrey M. Bradshaw and David J. Larsen, *In God’s Image and Likeness 2: Enoch, Noah, and the Tower of Babel*, 2 vols. (Orem, UT: Interpreter Foundation; Salt Lake City, UT: Eborn Books, 2014), 363–368.

Related verses

Genesis 10:11–20

43 Sarna, *Genesis*, 76.

44 Gordon J. Wenham, *Genesis 1–15*, Word Biblical Commentary 1 (Waco, TX: Word Books, 1987), 225.

45 Ronald S. Hendel, *Remembering Abraham: Culture, Memory, and History in the Hebrew Bible* (Oxford, England: Oxford University Press, 2005), 52–54.

46 Sarna, *Genesis*, 77. For additional detailed discussions of the boundary description found in Genesis 10:19, see Umberto Cassuto, *A Commentary on the Book of Genesis*, vol. 2, *From Noah to Abraham*, trans. Israel Abrahams (Jerusalem, Israel: Magnes Press, 1997), 212–216; Claus Westermann, ed., *Genesis 1–11: A Continental Commentary*, trans. John J. Scullion (Minneapolis, MN: Fortress Press, 1994), 523–524.

47 Scott H. Faulring, Kent P. Jackson, and Robert J. Matthews, eds., *Joseph Smith’s New Translation of the Bible: Original Manuscripts* (Provo, UT: Religious Studies Center, Brigham Young University, 2004), 119, 633.

Genesis 10:21–31. The Generations of Shem, Including Peleg

10:21. “*Shem*.” Genesis scholar John Sailhamer commented on the significance of this mention of Shem:

The author begins the list of the sons of Shem with a prosaic introduction (10:21). The purpose of the introduction is to draw out the major lines of continuity running through chapter 10. The author calls attention to the relationship of Shem and Japheth: “Shem, the older brother of Japheth,” and the relationship of Shem to the following generations: “Shem was the ancestor of all the sons of Eber.” The reference to Shem and Japheth together without Ham may be significant, possibly intended to recall Noah’s blessing of Shem and Japheth in Genesis 9:26–27, where also Canaan is excluded. . . . The mention of the “sons of Eber” anticipates the genealogy that yet lies ahead, the one that results in the birth of Abraham (11:10–26). So, before moving on to complete the list of the sons of Noah, the author inserts this short summary to tie the list to the preceding and following narrative contexts.⁴⁸

10:21. “*all the children of Eber*.” Genesis scholar Nahum Sarna explained the unexpected reference to Eber in this verse:

Although he is the fourth generation from Shem, he receives special mention here because he is the ancestor both of Israel and of a variety of peoples with whom Israelite history is closely intertwined. According to later genealogies in Genesis, these include Aramaeans, Ammonites, Moabites, Midianites, the Ishmaelite tribes, and the Edomites. One would expect these descendants of Eber to be called ‘Hebrews’ (Hebrew *ivrim*). Nevertheless, it is strange that of all the above-mentioned peoples, only the line of Abraham through Isaac and Jacob is so designated.⁴⁹

10:25. “*Peleg; for in his days was the earth divided*.” Bible scholar Claus Westermann noted that unlike most of the other names in Genesis 10, Peleg and Joktan, the sons of Eber, are “purely personal names.”⁵⁰ The Joseph Smith Translation reads, “Peleg was a mighty man, for in his days was the earth divided.”⁵¹ The description of Peleg as “a mighty man”⁵² recalls the figure of Nimrod. However, in contrast to Nimrod, who becomes the archetypal father of Babylon, Peleg will become the ancestor of the righteous Abraham (see 11:18–26). As Genesis scholar John Sailhamer observed,

48 John H. Sailhamer, “Genesis,” in *The Expositor’s Bible Commentary*, ed. Frank E. Gaebelein (Grand Rapids, MI: Zondervan, 1990), 101–102.

49 Nahum M. Sarna, *Genesis: The Traditional Hebrew Text with the New JPS Translation Commentary*, The JPS Torah Commentary, ed. Nahum M. Sarna and Chaim Potok (Philadelphia, PA: Jewish Publication Society, 1989), 78.

50 Claus Westermann, ed., *Genesis 1–11: A Continental Commentary*, trans. John J. Scullion (Minneapolis, MN: Fortress Press, 1994), 526.

51 Scott H. Faulring, Kent P. Jackson, and Robert J. Matthews, eds., *Joseph Smith’s New Translation of the Bible: Original Manuscripts* (Provo, UT: Religious Studies Center, Brigham Young University, 2004), 119, 633.

52 Compare Hebrew *gibbor*.

The notice “in his (i.e., Peleg’s) time the earth was divided (*niflegah*)” provides the narrative clue to the structure of the genealogies of Genesis 10 and 11. The genealogy of Shem (Genesis 10:21–31) is traced from Shem to the sons of Joktan, the brother of Peleg. After the account of the building of the city of Babylon, the genealogy of Shem is taken up again and traced through Peleg to Abraham (11:10–26). Thus the one line of Shem ends in Babylon and the other in the land with Abraham.⁵³

Confirming Sailhamer’s reading of the statement in the verse that “the earth [was] divided,” Latter-day Saint scholar B. Kent Harrison observed, “This division . . . is, of course, suggestive of continental drift, but the time scales are all wrong. The division of Earth may simply mean an earthquake [the word *Peleg* may mean ‘earthquake’]. It has also been suggested that the splitting is only political.”⁵⁴ Something like the latter interpretation is suggested by the wording of the Joseph Smith Translation given above, which seems to posit a causal connection between Peleg’s might and the division of the earth.

Note that the Hebrew root word *plg* can be used to mean “confusing speech,” as in Psalm 55:9.⁵⁵

10:30. “*And their dwelling was from Mesha, as thou goest unto Sephar a mount of the east.*” Regarding the context of this description, Sailhamer wrote, “What is the function of this obscure note regarding the homeland of those from the line of Joktan? Ostensibly it is to give the location of the settlement of the line, but narratively it serves to connect the line of Joktan with the account of the building of Babylon that follows. The link is made by means of the key term *har haqqedem* (literally, ‘mountain of the east’ or ‘eastern hill country’). The narrative is less interested in the exact location than it is in the association with the *miqqedem* (‘eastward’) of Genesis 11:2, the location of the ‘plain of Shinar’ where the city of Babylon was built.”⁵⁶

With this reference, and the summing-up epilogue of verse 31, the reader is ready to encounter the story of Babel in chapter 11.

53 Sailhamer, “Genesis,” 102. Compare Meir Zlotowitz, *Bereishis/Genesis: A New Translation with a Commentary Anthologized from Talmudic, Midrashic, and Rabbinic Sources*, 2nd ed., 2 vols. (New York, NY: Mesorah Publications, 1986), 1:329.

54 B. Kent Harrison, “Truth, the Sum of Existence,” in *Of Heaven and Earth: Reconciling Scientific Thought with LDS Theology*, ed. David L. Clark (Salt Lake City, UT: Deseret Book, 1998), 174. Of note here, George Reynolds and Janne M. Sjodahl concluded that the division “evidently refers to the allotment of the habitable portions of the earth to various families, tongues, and nations after the flood, under patriarchal inspiration” (*Commentary on the Book of Mormon*, 7 vols., ed. Philip C. Reynolds [Salt Lake City, UT: Deseret News Press, 1955], 2:319).

55 Gordon J. Wenham, *Genesis 1–15*, Word Biblical Commentary 1 (Waco, TX: Word Books, 1987), 231.

56 Sailhamer, “Genesis,” 103.

Source

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Genesis 10:21–31

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