

GENESIS 10:1-12:20

THE HINGE POINT OF THE OLD TESTAMENT

This morning I'm going to attempt to catch us up to where the quarterly has us, covering the high points from Genesis Chapters 10, 11 and 12. When I was in seminary my professor, when he was covering this part of Genesis, referred to it as the "hinge point of the entire Old Testament." By the time we finish today I think you'll see what he meant by that. The narrative of God's redemptive plan of human history suddenly shifts from Him working through key individuals (Adam, Seth, Enoch and Noah) to Him beginning to accomplish His purposes through one holy nation.

Let's begin by looking at the highlights of Genesis Chapter 10.

READ Genesis 10:1

Later we will read in v 5, "From these the coastland peoples spread in their lands, each with his OWN LANGUAGE, by their clans, in their nations." They had their own language! That's interesting because Genesis Chapter 11 begins by telling us that "the whole earth had one language." So how is it that all of these various people groups end up with their own language? It is the whole Tower of Babel story in Genesis Chapter 11 which we will talk about later. What you need to notice is that all the scattering of people groups we see here in Genesis Chapter 10 take place AFTER the Tower of Babel. Keep that in mind.

Moses, the writer of Genesis begins with the sons of Japheth.

READ Genesis 10:2-5

Gomer (the Cimmerians); settled north of the Black Sea, occupied Germany, Spain, France and the British Isles.

Magog (the Scythians); lived north of the Caspian Sea, migrated to present day Bulgaria, Hungary and Ukraine.

Madai (the Medes); settled south of the Caspian Sea., migrated to modern day Iran

Javan (the Greeks); they settled in Greece and southern Europe.

Tubal (the Turks); lived south of the Black Sea.

Meshech (the Slavs); lived between the Black and Caspian Seas in the region we know today as Russia.

Tiras (the Etruscans); located west of the Black Sea; some descendants migrated north toward Sweden and the Scandinavian region, others migrated to northeastern Asia and eventually made their way across the Bering Strait and down into the Americas.

Japheth's family then migrates north, west and east stretching from Europe to India. They become the primary colonizers of the world – Europe, much of Asia and the Americas. Japheth's descendants today make up most of the world's population living on most of the world's land.

Now Moses talks about the sons of Ham...

READ Genesis 10:6-14

Cush (the Ethiopians); settled in Ethiopia south of Egypt, also migrated to an area north of the Persian Gulf.

It says that Cush fathered Nimrod. Nimrod was the one who ruled over four cities, one which was Babel in the land of Shinar. Flavius Josephus (Jewish historian) characterizes Nimrod as a powerful and ruthless tyrant who opposed God. It is very likely that Nimrod is the leader, the king of these people.

Egypt (also known as Mizraim); settled in northeastern Africa. The Philistines were among their descendants.

Put (the Libyans); settled in northern Africa

Canaan; they primarily settled north of Africa and east of the Mediterranean Sea.

READ Genesis 10:15-20

If many of these names sound familiar, there is a good reason for that. They're mentioned throughout the Old Testament as those many –"ites" who were the enemies of the nation of Israel. Of note the Jebusites were the ones who originally established the stronghold at Jerusalem. It was later conquered by King David and became Israel's capital. Another thing worth noting is that the Sinites who are listed in v 17 later migrated east into Asia and were most likely the ancestors of the Chinese people.

Ham's descendants migrated south and east into Africa and Asia.

Last but certainly not least are the sons of Shem...

READ Genesis 10:21-31

Elam (the Persians); settled northeast of the Persian Gulf.

Asshur (the Assyrians); settled between the Tigris & Euphrates Rivers.

Arpachshad (the Babylonians); settled in Chaldea. Abraham is a distant descendant of Arpachshad as noted in the Chapter 11 genealogy. As we will soon see, God's covenant people the Jews will be formed from him.

Lud (the Lydians); settled in Asia Minor, but some sailed across the Mediterranean and settled in northern Africa.

Aram (the Syrians), located north and east of Israel.

Shem's descendants migrated north, south and east populating much of the Middle East.

READ Genesis 10:32

What you need to see from this lesson is that Noah's sons did as God had instructed them to do. They were fruitful and multiplied and they literally filled the earth. Eight people immediately following the Flood has ballooned to 8 billion over the last 5000 years or so. As we read through Genesis, the people after the Flood really don't turn out to be a whole lot different than the people before the flood. Just like we saw before back in

Genesis Chapter 4 there is a downward spiritual spiral as people rebel against God and engage in idol worship, pagan religious practices. And this takes us to Genesis Chapter 11.

READ Genesis 11:1

For the first 100-years-plus after the flood everyone spoke one common language and had the same vocabulary.

READ Genesis 11:2

From the mountains of Ararat (where Noah and his family started) to the Mesopotamian Valley, the fertile crescent region (where the plain of Shinar was located) was a SE journey. The text says that they "settled there." They stopped moving and congregated in one general area.

READ Genesis 11:3-4

Contrast what Noah built with what the people here want to build. Ingenious, crafty, proud, rebellious. They devise a plan – they are going to do what they want rather than what God wants.

Three parts to their plan – build a city, build a tower, make a name for themselves.

In the center of each town, was the Ziggurat. The Ziggurat was a temple. The ancient Sumerians, believed their gods lived in the sky. In order for the gods to hear better, you needed to get closer to them. Ziggurats were huge, with built in steps. Ziggurats had a wide base that narrowed to a flat top. When the Babylonians took over in the south, and the Assyrians in the north, ziggurats continued to be built and used in the same manner as they were in ancient Sumer. The Ziggurat was the tallest building in the town. From its top, you could see well into the farmlands that surrounded the city. The largest ziggurat was probably the one built in ancient Babylon. The Assyrians also built ziggurats.

What you need to understand is that these people here in this chapter are NOT God-fearing people. They are not following after the one true

God. In fact we can see by their actions here that they are rebellious and defiant – they are going against what God had told Noah and his descendants to do. They are putting their own personal ambition, to make a name for themselves, above what God had commanded them to do. They are a rebellious people working to prevent the very thing that God wants, v 4, “lest we be dispersed over the face of the whole earth.”

“Come, let us --- “We’re going to do this instead... build a great city and tower.

Well how does God respond?

READ Genesis 11:5

“The Lord came down...” John MacArthur says this: “No matter how high they built their tower, God had to come down to get to it. Way down. They didn't get close.” Of course this notion of God “coming down” is what we call anthropomorphic language. In other words, in this case, ascribing human characteristics to God. Similar to when the Lord smelled the soothing aroma of Noah’s burnt offering.

READ Genesis 11:6

God observes that the sin and rebellion of mankind has a united front with unrestrained unilateral evil. There is a reason why God wants separate independent nations over the face of the earth. There needs to be checks and balances. Otherwise you get one dictator uniting all people toward an evil agenda and that’s not good.

Well, God announces HIS plan...

READ Genesis 11:7

“Come let Us” - God in one divine act creates different languages and the result is mass confusion. That pretty well put an end to their ill-conceived building project and they quickly scattered. Today there are nearly 7,000 different languages in the world. Approximately half the people in the world speak one or more of 15 languages, 90% of the

world's population speaks one or more of 100 languages. Language tends to separate people. People will tend to congregate and socialize with those who share a common language and culture.

READ Genesis 11:8

"The Lord dispersed them." It was a divine act of God. Evil, rebellious people spread out and they take their sinful pagan practices, their warped ideas about God with them. And within just a few generations the earth is inhabited. Not by God-fearers but by ungodly idolatrous people who reject God.

Moses, the writer of Genesis, offers some closing words where he summarizes the events...

READ Genesis 11:9

"Babel" is a term for confusion, even in English!

Well, the world turns out to be just as sinful after the flood as it was before. So what is God going to do about it? He promised Noah and his family that He would never again destroy the earth by water. But will He judge it some other way? Is God going to destroy sinful humanity? Well as we are going to see the answer to this is "No, He's not."

The rest of Genesis Chapter 11 provides us with a detailed genealogy from Noah's son Shem to an unknown man by the name of Abram. Despite mankind's rebellion and propensity toward evil, God in His mercy decides rather than destroy them (as he did previously) He will redeem them. Like before, God chooses one righteous man thru whom to carry out His plan. That man is Abram who will become prominent in the next several chapters. But this man Abram isn't told to build a boat. Through Abram God will do the building. He's going to build a special nation through whom He will save and restore fallen humanity. And that brings us to Genesis Chapter 12.

READ Genesis 12:1-3

We know from the end of Genesis Chapter 11 that Abram and his family were originally from Ur of the Chaldeans which is in southern Mesopotamia near the Persian Gulf. At some point his family migrated north along the Euphrates River to Haran where they settled. God's call which we just read comes right after Abram's father dies.

In v 1 we see that God leads Abram to go to a place he has never seen before, the land of Canaan. In v 2 it's interesting that God tells Abram "I will make of you a great nation... I will make your name great." What a contrast this is to the people of Babel who back in Genesis Chapter 11 proudly declared, "Let us make a name for ourselves."

V 3 is vitally important to grasp. God is going to bless the nation that comes from Abram. He is also going to bless everyone who in turn blesses that nation. We know that this nation later will be the Israelites, the Jews.

The second part says, "to [those] that dishonor you, I [the LORD] will curse." The last part of this verse is important for us Gentiles – "In you [Abram and the nation of Israel] all the families of the earth shall be blessed." The Apostle Paul in Galatians 3:8 sees this promise here as being fulfilled in Jesus Christ through whom we believe and are saved.

READ Genesis 12:4-9

So, God promises to give Abram the land presently occupied by the wicked Canaanites. Abram's large family is nomadic. They dwell in tents and move around. They settle in the southern part of the land of Canaan toward the Negeb which is good wide open grazing land and not near any major towns.

"By faith Abraham obeyed when he was called to go out to a place that he was to receive as an inheritance. And he went out, not knowing where he was going. By faith he went to live in the land of promise, as in a foreign land, living in tents with Isaac and Jacob, heirs with him of the same promise" (Hebrews 11:8-9).

Over the next few weeks, we are going to learn what a great man of faith Abram (later named Abraham) was and how God richly blessed him.

You will notice that Genesis Chapter 12 doesn't end with v 9, "and they all live happily ever after." No, there is a story at the end of Genesis Chapter 12 that we don't often study. In fact, our quarterly ignored it. But I want to draw your attention to it. Abram and his family arrive in the Promised Land and lo and behold there's this famine throughout the land. You talk about a crisis of faith. God leads you away from your comfort zone in Haran where everything is good, to this strange new place and right off the bat they experience this severe famine. So the family goes to where there's food, down to Egypt. Abram gets concerned because he has this hot wife named Sarai – she's 65 years old and gorgeous! He thinks the Egyptians will kill him in order to take his wife. There's absolutely no reason for Abram to think that, but he does. God hasn't led them all this way just to let Abram die. This is all in his head. Abram gets worried for no reason and then lies about his relationship with Sarai. He claims that she is just his sister. Why is this story here? To show us that Abram, blessed as he was, chosen by God, this wonderful guy, is a fallible human being with faults like all of us.

One of the things I love about the many characters in the Bible is that even our heroes reveal that they are sinful human beings just like us.

Here's the fascinating part of this story. The king of Egypt, the Pharaoh sees Sarai and takes her into his harem. As a result God afflicts Pharaoh and his house with all sorts of plagues. Well, give Pharaoh some credit. He quickly realizes what the problem is. He calls Abram down on it. "Why did you lie and say that she (Sarai) was your sister?" The king then basically kicks Abram, Sarai and the rest of the family out of Egypt and sends them home. Just to show you how blessed Abram is by God, he ends up leaving Egypt with many more possessions than what he arrived with – sheep, donkeys, servants and camels. Pharaoh ends up dealing kindly with Abram for his wife Sarai's sake. Even when Abram messes things up, God takes care of him. And we will see this play out further over the next few

chapters. Abram will become the father of a great nation thru whom God will bless the entire world through.

So now you can see why this is the hinge point for the Old Testament. There is mercy instead of judgment; blessing instead of curse; and life instead of death. It all turns right here in these chapters!