

# genesis

Creation & Blessing  
Genesis 9.18-10.32➔

## **A Noah's family is our family. (9.18-19)**

**9**<sup>18</sup> The sons of Noah who went forth from the ark were Shem, Ham, and Japheth. (Ham was the father of Canaan.) <sup>19</sup> These three were the sons of Noah, and from these the people of the whole earth were dispersed.

## **B Ham sins and Canaan is cursed. (9.20-28)**

<sup>20</sup> Noah began to be a man of the soil, and he planted a vineyard. <sup>21</sup> He drank of the wine and became drunk and lay uncovered in his tent. <sup>22</sup> And Ham, the father of Canaan, saw the nakedness of his father and told his two brothers outside. <sup>23</sup> Then Shem and Japheth took a garment, laid it on both their shoulders, and walked backward and covered the nakedness of their father. Their faces were turned backward, and they did not see their father's nakedness. <sup>24</sup> When Noah awoke from his wine and knew what his youngest son had done to him, <sup>25</sup> he said,

“Cursed be Canaan;  
a servant of servants shall he be to his brothers.”

<sup>26</sup> He also said,

“Blessed be the LORD, the God of Shem;  
and let Canaan be his servant.

<sup>27</sup> May God enlarge Japheth,  
and let him dwell in the tents of Shem,  
and let Canaan be his servant.”

<sup>28</sup> After the flood Noah lived 350 years. <sup>29</sup> All the days of Noah were 950 years, and he died.

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## **C** The descendants of Noah and his family are traced. (10.1-32) [Table of nations]

**10** These are the generations of the sons of Noah, Shem, Ham, and Japheth. Sons were born to them after the flood.

<sup>2</sup>The sons of Japheth: Gomer, Magog, Madai, Javan, Tubal, Meshech, and Tiras. <sup>3</sup>The sons of Gomer: Ashkenaz, Riphath, and Togarmah. <sup>4</sup>The sons of Javan: Elishah, Tarshish, Kittim, and Dodanim. <sup>5</sup>From these the coastland peoples spread in their lands, each with his own language, by their clans, in their nations.

<sup>6</sup>The sons of Ham: Cush, Egypt, Put, and Canaan. <sup>7</sup>The sons of Cush: Seba, Havilah, Sabtah, Raamah, and Sabteca. The sons of Raamah: Sheba and Dedan. <sup>8</sup>Cush fathered Nimrod; he was the first on earth to be a mighty man. <sup>9</sup>He was a mighty hunter before the LORD. Therefore it is said, "Like Nimrod a mighty hunter before the LORD." <sup>10</sup>The beginning of his kingdom was Babel, Erech, Accad, and Calneh, in the land of Shinar. <sup>11</sup>From that land he went into Assyria and built Nineveh, Rehoboth-Ir, Calah, and <sup>12</sup>Resen between Nineveh and Calah; that is the great city. <sup>13</sup>Egypt fathered Ludim, Anamim, Lehabim, Naphtuhim, <sup>14</sup>Pathrusim, Casluhim (from whom the Philistines came), and Caphtorim.

<sup>15</sup>Canaan fathered Sidon his firstborn and Heth, <sup>16</sup>and the Jebusites, the Amorites, the Girgashites, <sup>17</sup>the Hivites, the Arkites, the Sinites, <sup>18</sup>the Arvadites, the Zemarites, and the Hamathites. Afterward the clans of the Canaanites dispersed. <sup>19</sup>And the territory of the Canaanites extended from Sidon in the direction of Gerar as far as Gaza, and in the direction of Sodom, Gomorrah, Admah, and Zeboiim, as far as Lasha. <sup>20</sup>These are the sons of Ham, by their clans, their languages, their lands, and their nations.

<sup>21</sup>To Shem also, the father of all the children of Eber, the elder brother of Japheth, children were born. <sup>22</sup>The sons of Shem: Elam, Asshur, Arpachshad, Lud, and Aram. <sup>23</sup>The sons of Aram: Uz, Hul, Gether, and Mash. <sup>24</sup>Arpachshad fathered Shelah; and Shelah fathered Eber. <sup>25</sup>To Eber were born two sons: the name of the one was Peleg, for in his days the earth was divided, and his brother's name was Joktan. <sup>26</sup>Joktan fathered Almodad, Sheleph, Hazarmaveth, Jerah, <sup>27</sup>Hadoram, Uzal, Diklah, <sup>28</sup>Obal, Abimael, Sheba, <sup>29</sup>Ophir, Havilah, and Jobab; all these were the sons of Joktan. <sup>30</sup>The territory in which they lived extended from Mesha in the direction of Sephar to the hill country of the east. <sup>31</sup>These are the sons of Shem, by their clans, their languages, their lands, and their nations.

<sup>32</sup>These are the clans of the sons of Noah, according to their genealogies, in their nations, and from these the nations spread abroad on the earth after the flood.

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9:18–29 This passage has several interpretive problems that have always plagued Bible scholars. It is important to remember the purpose of the book, for this passage has direct reference to the nature and destiny of the Canaanites, Israel’s antagonists.<sup>1</sup>

The descendants of **Shem** were the Shemites from whom Abraham descended (cf. 10:21–31; 11:10–26).

Though **wine** is said to cheer the heart (Jud. 9:13; Ps. 104:15) and alleviate the pain of the curse (Prov. 31:6), it is also clear that it has disturbing effects. Here Noah lay **drunk** and naked in **his tent**.

The basic question concerns what **Ham**, Noah’s youngest son, did (9:22, 24) and why Noah cursed Ham’s “son” Canaan (vv. 25–27). Many fanciful ideas have been proposed. The rabbis said Ham castrated Noah, thus explaining why Noah had no other sons. Others claim that Ham slept with his mother, thus uncovering his father’s nakedness, and that Canaan was the offspring of that union. Others have said that Ham was involved in a homosexual attack on his father. But the Hebrew expression here means what it says: **Ham ... saw his father’s nakedness** (v. 22). He was not involved with Noah sexually, for in that case the Hebrew would be translated “he uncovered (causative form of *gālâh*) his father’s nakedness.” Instead Noah had already **uncovered** himself (*wayyitgal*, reflexive form, v. 21), and **Ham** saw him that way.

To the ancients, however, even seeing one’s father naked was a breach of family ethic. The sanctity of the family was destroyed and the strength of the father was made a mockery. Ham apparently stumbled on this accidentally, but went out and exultingly **told his two brothers**, as if he had triumphed over his father.

So what seems to be a trivial incident turned out to be a major event. Noah’s oracle (vv. 25–27) showed that the natures of his three sons would be perpetuated in their descendants.

In all but one of the verses in Leviticus 18:6–19, Moses used the causative form of the verb *gālâh* to refer to the Canaanites’ (Ham’s descendants) “uncovering” another’s nakedness (rendered in the NIV, “have sexual relations”). This euphemism reports the actual licentious and repulsively immoral behavior of the descendants of Ham (cf. Lev. 18:3). Ham’s disposition toward moral abandon thus bore fruit in the immoral acts of his descendants, the Canaanites.

**Lev 18.**<sup>6-19</sup> *“None of you shall approach any one of his close relatives to uncover nakedness. I am the Lord. <sup>7</sup> You shall not uncover the nakedness of your father, which is the nakedness of your mother; she is your mother, you shall not uncover her nakedness....*

9:24–29. Because of this incident **Noah** prophesied about his sons’ descendants. He began with the direct words, **Cursed be Canaan!** However, Noah was not punishing Ham’s son for something *Ham* did. Instead, Noah’s words referred to the nation of Canaanites that would come from Ham through Canaan. Ham’s act of hubris could not be left without repercussions. A humiliation in like measure was needed, according to the principle of retributive justice.

Noah’s oracle predicted that the Canaanites would be in servitude to the Shemites and Japhethites (vv. 26–27). But this was because the Canaanites lived degrading lives like Ham, not because of what Ham did. The point is that nationally, at least, drunken debauchery enslaves a people. This is why, in God’s program to bless Israel, the Canaanites were condemned. They were to be judged by God through the Conquest because their activities were in the same pattern and mold as their ancestor Ham.

The enslavement of Canaanites is seen in many situations in the history of the Old Testament...But Noah’s words seem to be more of a general than a specific prophecy, that the line of **Shem** will be blessed and the line of Ham in **Canaan** will be cursed.

This blessing-cursing motif is crucial in Genesis. The Canaanites would have to be dispossessed from their place by Israel under Joshua in order for blessing to come on Shem (v. 26) and for the Japhethites to dwell **in the tents of Shem** (v. 27). This meant that the Japhethites would live with the Shemites on friendly terms, not that the Japhethites would dispossess the Shemites. So verses 24–29 actually set the foundation for Israel’s foreign policy in the land (Deut. 20:16–18).

This table appears to represent the known tribes of the earth. Seventy descendants of Noah’s sons are listed, including 14 from Japheth, 30 from Ham, and 26 from Shem. And these are cleverly arranged into patterns.

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<sup>1</sup> Allen P. Ross, “Genesis,” in *The Bible Knowledge Commentary: An Exposition of the Scriptures*, ed. J. F. Walvoord and R. B. Zuck, vol. 1 (Wheaton, IL: Victor Books, 1985), 40–41.

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The basic framework of the table is the *benê* (“the sons of”) motif (the Heb. *benê* occurs 12 times, in vv. 2–4, 6–7, 20–23, 29, 31–32). Other times, however, the chapter uses *yālaḡ* (“he begot”), which seems to suggest that these were interpretations given to the *benê* table. These *yālaḡ* sections (beginning in vv. 8, 13, 15, 21, 25–26), in line with the idea of the *tōleḡōt*, trace the significant developments of personages within the structure of the table. (The NIV renders the *yālaḡ* verb “was the father of” in vv. 8, 13, 15, 26, “was the ancestor of” in v. 21, and “were born to” in v. 25.) Of special note are verses 15–19, in which Canaan’s descendants are traced (vv. 15–18) and even the boundaries of the Promised Land are given (v. 19). The writer was apparently using an ancient table to clarify which of Noah’s descendants would experience blessing and which ones would experience cursing. Most of the *yālaḡ* (“he begot”) sections pertain to the Canaanites or the Hamites, the tribes close to Israel. To see which neighbors would face blessing and which ones cursing, Israel need only consult this table.

The table of nations is a “horizontal” genealogy rather than a “vertical” one (those in chaps. 5 and 11 are vertical). Its purpose is not primarily to trace ancestry; instead it shows political, geographical, and ethnic affiliations among tribes for various reasons, most notable being holy war. Tribes shown to be “kin” would be in league together. Thus this table aligns the predominant tribes in and around the land promised to Israel. These names include founders of tribes, clans, cities, and territories.

The table shows which peoples in the ancient world shared in the blessing and cursing motif. The table also stresses how they spread out and replenished the earth, though not in obedience. They all came from one, Noah, and were therefore one people; but some were closely related and others were distant. The table also shows the plight of the human race, scattered across the face of the earth and living according to their own cultural and linguistic affiliations. Wars and conflicts inevitably result from this arrangement.

10:2–5. The descendants of **Japheth**, numbering 14, were given first. These were northern people, remote from Israel.

10:6–7. The descendants of **Ham** (vv. 6–20) formed the eastern and southern peoples of Mesopotamia.

10:8–12. Inserted in this table of nations is the story of **Nimrod**. This is the first “begot” (NIV, **was the father of**) section (cf. comments on v. 1) and forms a major stylistic break from the tribal names preceding it. Attempts to identify or date Nimrod have proven unsuccessful. Because his name seems to be connected with the verb “to rebel” (*māraḡ*), tradition has identified him with tyrannical power. He was the founder of the earliest imperial world powers in **Babylon** and **Assyria**. The table simply presents him as a **mighty hunter**, a trait found commonly in Assyrian kings. He was founder of several powerful cities. The **centers** he established became major enemies of Israel.

10:13–14. Another “son” of Ham was **Mizraim**, or Egypt. Mizraim developed into (*yālaḡ*) tribes that ranged from North Africa to Crete. The placing of **the Philistines** in this connection represents migration, not lineage (similar to Israel being “from” Egypt). The Philistines migrated **from** their Aegean homelands through Caphtor into the Delta of Egypt and finally to Palestine.

10:15–20. The final Hamite line that was significant for Israel was **the Canaanite** group. Once again the listing employs “begot” (*yālaḡ*) to list the cities and tribes of peoples living in the Promised Land. **Sidon** was the predominant Phoenician city. **Hittites** (*hēt*, “Heth”) is problematic, but may refer to a pocket of Hittites from the early movements of tribes. The **Jebusites** dwelt in Jerusalem. **Amorites** was a general reference to western Semites, but here points to a smaller ethnic group in the mixed population of Canaan. The other seven Canaanite tribal names are less problematic; they were tribes that settled in Lebanon, Hamath on the Orontes River, and all through the land. Their listing is significant after the passage pronouncing the curse on Canaan (9:25–27).

10:21–31. The descendants from **Shem** are recorded last. Elamites, descendants of Shem’s first son **Elam**, dwelt in the highlands east of Babylonia.

10:32. Here is a colophon-type ending, reminding the readers that all families came from Noah, but some were of special interest for the nation Israel.

#### 5. RENEWAL AND REPEOPLING (8:15–10:32)

#### 9:18–29. The destinies of Shem, Ham and Japheth<sup>2</sup>

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<sup>2</sup> Derek Kidner, *Genesis: An Introduction and Commentary*, vol. 1, Tyndale Old Testament Commentaries (Downers Grove, IL: InterVarsity Press, 1967), 110.

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**18** Noah's sons have already been named in 5:32; 6:10; 7:13. Here they are reintroduced by way of background information to clarify the subsequent story. For the same reason Ham's son, Canaan, is also mentioned, for he figures in the curse and blessing; cf. 9:25–27.

**19** "From them the whole earth was populated." Understanding "was populated" from the root of נָפַץ links this verse with 1 Sam 13:11, Isa 33:3, where it means "scatter." However, it must also be associated with another similar root, פָּרַץ, which is frequent in Gen 10–11; cf. 10:18; 11:4, 8, 9, again meaning to "scatter." So this remark anticipates the dispersal of mankind throughout the world as related in Gen 10–11. The obvious contrast with the small number who emerged from the ark shows that the command to "be fruitful and multiply and fill the earth" (9:1, 7) was indeed carried out by Noah's descendants.

Whereas Noah's ancestors raised only the most basic foodstuffs (cf. 3:18–19; 4:2), Noah introduces the cultivation of luxury items so that he can produce "wine that maketh glad the heart of man" (Ps 104:15). It is interesting that the vine comes originally from Armenia, which is where the biblical ark landed. According to Mesopotamian tradition, however, viticulture antedated the flood, for Utnapishtim plied the ark builders with wine (GE 11:72–73).

Ham's actions show clear disrespect for his father and this merited his father's wrath. Uncovering oneself was dishonorable, and Noah's son should have quietly covered him up, not gossiped about it to his brothers. Others have felt that Noah's reaction indicates that Ham must have done something worse than is actually described. Seeing his father's nakedness must be a euphemism for a more serious offense. Overindulgence in alcohol and sexual misconduct go hand in hand in Scripture and in modern society (cf. 19:32–35). Is this what is being hinted at here? These are some of the major questions posed by this story.

"He drank some wine." It is certainly most unlikely that Noah is being censured for this. Wine is seen as one of God's gifts to man (Ps 104:15). Every burnt or peace offering had to be accompanied by a libation of wine (Num 15:5–10), and Deut 14:26 encourages its purchase at the festivals. Indeed, the vine was one of Israel's national symbols (Isa 5:1–7; Mark 12:1–11).

However, running through the same literature there is frequent mention of the dangers of wine. A key element of the Nazirite vow (the Nazirites were the holiest laymen in ancient Israel) was abstinence from any alcohol or product of the vine (Num 6:3–4). Priests were forbidden drink before officiating in the sanctuary "lest you die" (Lev 10:9). Clearly, insobriety was regarded as incompatible with holiness. And the ordinary laity are warned about the dangers of drinking too much wine (Isa 5:22; Prov 21:17; 23:20–21, 29–35). Men "are confused with wine ... they err in vision" (Isa 28:7). Drunkenness in particular is deprecated (1 Sam 1:14), especially when it leads to self-exposure (Hab 2:15; Lam 4:21), and its punishment is used by the prophets as an image of divine judgment (Isa 63:6; Jer 51:57). To uncover oneself is regarded as not merely publicly demeaning (e.g., 2 Sam 6:16), but incompatible with living in the presence of God (Exod 20:26; Deut 23:13–15 [12–14]; cf. Gen 3:21). Drewermann draws parallels between Noah's consuming wine and Adam's eating the forbidden fruit, and also with the drunken orgies that accompanied Canaanite fertility cults: "The humanity that begins with Noah fully parallels the humanity that preceded the flood" (252).

**22** However, Westermann is right to see the chief thrust of the story as blaming Ham for his improper, quite unfilial behavior. Throughout the ancient world, and even today in traditional societies, honoring parents is a most sacred duty. The OT certainly underlines and reinforces this attitude in the decalogue ("Honor your father and mother"), and in Deut 27:15–26 this is the first of the manward commandments, coming immediately after the Godward commands and before the prohibitions on murder and adultery. The case law backs this up with dire threats of capital sentences on those who strike or curse their parents (Exod 21:15, 17; cf. Deut 21:18–21; cf. Mark 7:10). The book of Proverbs repeatedly urges devotion to parents and their instruction.

But no doubt Israelites would have agreed with the Ugaritic Aqht epic which states that a son should take his father "by the hand when he's drunk, carries him when he's sated with wine" (A 1.32–33, *ANET*, 150). In other words, he must try tactfully to cover up his father's folly.

**25** "And he said 'Cursed be Canaan, the lowest of slaves to his brother shall he be.'" On the term "cursed," אָרַר, cf. above on 3:14. This is the first time a man is recorded as uttering a curse. Though it is not stated, Noah's words evidently have divine authority and affect the future.

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Why should Noah have cursed Canaan, Ham's son, and not Ham himself?...three explanations have merit. First, *Ber. Rab.* 36:7 points out that God had recently pronounced his blessing on Noah and his sons (9:1), so that Noah could not really unsay that promise. Second, there may well be an element of mirroring punishment: here Noah's youngest son, Ham, sinned against him; therefore it was appropriate that Ham's youngest son, Canaan, should be punished for his father's wickedness (so Delitzsch, Gispén). Third, the sons of Noah embody and personify the character of their descendants. From Ham descended Cush, Egypt, Put, and Canaan (10:6). Now the Canaanites are notorious throughout the Old Testament for their aberrant sexual practices, and Lev 18:3 links both Egypt and Canaan as peoples whose habits are abominable: "You shall not do as they do in the land of Egypt ... and ... as they do in the land of Canaan." Ham's indiscretion towards his father may easily be seen as a type of the later behavior of the Egyptians and Canaanites. Noah's curse on Canaan thus represents God's sentence on the sins of the Canaanites, which their forefather Ham had exemplified.

In the post-flood stories there is thus a distinct change of perspective. The antediluvian chapters tell of events that affected all mankind: these post-flood narratives tell of happenings that molded the lives and characters of the peoples of the world.

Skinner sums up the problem neatly: "Three points may be regarded as settled: that Shem is that family to which the Hebrews reckoned themselves; that Canaan stands for the pre-Israelitish inhabitants of Palestine; and that the servitude of Canaan to Shem at least *includes* the subjugation of the Canaanites in the early days of the monarchy. Beyond this everything is uncertain" (186).

Gen 6–9 uses various devices to draw attention to the way the flood closed one epoch of world history and opened another. Noah's death and Arpachshad's birth are dated by the flood. And the narrative goes to extraordinary lengths to date every phase of the flood exactly.

In stressing the epoch-dividing character of the flood, Genesis is at one with Mesopotamian tradition. Indeed, many of the narrative features, the universality of the flood, the ark, the birds and the sacrifice, are astonishingly similar. At no other point do Genesis and oriental tradition appear so close. Yet, equally, at no point are they so divergent and the differences between biblical and Mesopotamian theology so sharply defined.

In Gen 1 a clear polemic against oriental notions of divinity and ancient creation myths was noted. The God of Genesis is shown as supreme and omnipotent, not struggling against various rival deities such as the sun and moon or the monsters of the deep. God's word alone calls the cosmos into existence. Man is the apex of God's creative activity in Genesis, whereas Mesopotamia viewed him as an afterthought to relieve the gods of working and to supply them with food.

The God of Genesis is not only omniscient and omnipotent, properties the Babylonian gods clearly lack, but he is himself moral and just in dealing with his creation. Mankind is not destroyed for noisiness or excessive fertility but for his depravity.

"Every idea ... of his mind was nothing but evil all the time" (6:5). "The earth was ruined, because all flesh (that is, both man and animals) has ruined its way on earth" (6:12). It therefore fitted the offense when God declared, "I am about to ruin them with the earth" (6:13).

The narrative thus places great emphasis on Noah's righteousness, at least during the flood itself. But it would be too crude to say that the story portrays Noah as earning his salvation by good works.

The other feature of the story that emphasizes God's mercy is the promise of earth's preservation and the blessing pronounced on her inhabitants after the flood. The LORD's assurance that "never again shall I smite every living thing as I have done" is prompted by his smelling the burnt offering and the observation that the "ideas of a man's mind are evil from his youth" (8:21). What previously had been cited as the reason for the extinction of all flesh is now declared to be God's motive for its preservation. Evidently the priestly-mediatorial role of Noah and his sacrificial offering has profoundly influenced God's attitude to mankind. These divine reflections on the nature of man form the backdrop to the fanfare of blessing on Noah and his sons in which the commission first given to Adam "to be fruitful and multiply; fill the earth and subdue it" (1:28; 9:1) is reaffirmed afresh.

Even the most righteous and their offspring may fall from grace in an unguarded moment. And such falls do have long-term consequences, as the curse on Ham's descendants the Canaanites makes clear....However, even sinful man is now sustained by grace and can face the future not with complacency but with security. The world will indeed be filled and subdued by man.

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The NT also regards Noah as an example of faith and hero of righteousness (Heb 11:7; 2 Pet 2:5; cf. 1 Pet 3:20). Jesus compares his second advent to the coming of the flood: it too will take most men by surprise and only a few will be saved (Matt 24:37–38; Luke 17:26–27).

The history of Noah and his family now moves from rainbows to shadows, and we behold the shameful sins of a great man of faith.<sup>3</sup>

*Disgrace (vv. 20–21).* In becoming a farmer, Noah followed the vocation of his father Lamech (5:28–29). While the Bible condemns drunkenness (Prov. 20:1; 23:19–21, 29–35; Isa. 5:11; Hab. 2:15; Rom. 13:13; 1 Cor. 6:10; Eph. 5:18), it doesn't condemn the growing or eating of grapes or the drinking of wine. Grapes, raisins, and wine were important elements in the diet of Eastern peoples. In fact, in Old Testament society, wine was considered a blessing from God (Ps. 104:14–15; Deut. 14:26) and was even used with the sacrifices (Lev. 23:13; Num. 28:7).

Both his drunkenness and his nakedness were disgraceful, and the two often go together (Gen. 19:30–38; Hab. 2:15–16; Lam. 4:21). Alcohol isn't a stimulant, it's a narcotic; and when the brain is affected by alcohol, the person loses self-control. At least Noah was in his own tent when this happened and not out in public.

*Decency (v. 23).* Instead of laughing with Ham and going to see the humiliating sight, Shem and Japheth showed their love for their father by practicing Proverbs 10:12, "Love covers all sins" (NKJV; see 1 Peter 4:8).

*Canaan—enslavement (v. 25).* If Noah had wanted to pronounce a curse, it would have been directed at Ham, the son who had sinned against his father; but instead, he named Canaan three times. It was a principle in later Jewish law that the children could not be punished for the sins of their fathers (Deut. 24:16; Jer. 31:29–30; Ezek. 18:1–4), and it's likely that this principle applied in patriarchal times.

Looking down the centuries, Noah predicted three times that the descendants of Canaan would become the lowest of servants. The Canaanites are listed in Genesis 10:15–19 and are the very nations the Israelites conquered and whose land they inhabited (15:18–21; Ex. 3:8, 17; Num. 13:29; Josh. 3:10; 1 Kings 9:20). It's difficult to describe the moral decay of the Canaanite society, especially their religious practices; but the laws given in Leviticus 18 will give you some idea of how they lived. God warned the Jews not to compromise with the Canaanite way of life and to destroy everything that would tempt them in that direction (Ex. 34:10–17; Deut. 7).

Two misconceptions should be cleared up. First, the descendants of Ham were not members of a black race but were Caucasian, so there's no basis in this so-called "curse of Canaan" for the institution of slavery. Second, in spite of their evil ways, some of these Hamitic peoples built large and advanced civilizations, including the Babylonians, Assyrians, and Egyptians. In one sense, we can say that the descendants of Ham "served" the whole world through the ideas and implements that they discovered and developed. Like the Cainites (Gen. 4:17–24), these nations were gifted at creating things for this world (Luke 16:8).

*Japheth—enlargement (v. 27).* He was the ancestor of what we generally call the "Gentile nations." We have here a play on words, for in the Hebrew the name Japheth is very close to the word that means "to enlarge." The Hamites built large civilizations in the east, and the Semites settled in the land of Canaan and surrounding territory, but the descendants of Japheth spread out much farther than their relatives and even reached what we know as Asia Minor and Europe. They were a people who would multiply and move into new territory.

However, while the descendants of Japheth were successful in their conquests, when it came to things spiritual, they would have to depend on Shem. God is the God of Shem and the descendants of Japheth would find God "in the tents of Shem." Israel was chosen by God to be a "light to the Gentiles" (Isa. 42:6; 49:6), for "salvation is of the Jews" (John 4:22). Sad to say, for the most part, the nation of Israel failed to witness to the Gentiles that they might believe in the true and living God (Isa. 52:5; Rom. 2:24).

When Jesus came to earth, He brought light to the Gentiles (Luke 2:32), and the apostles and the early church carried that light to the nations (Acts 1:8; 13:47). The descendants of Noah's three sons were represented in the early church: the Ethiopian treasurer, a descendant of Ham (8:26ff); Paul, a descendant of Shem (Acts 9); and Cornelius and his family, who were descendants of Japheth (Acts 10).

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<sup>3</sup> Warren W. Wiersbe, *Be Basic*, "Be" Commentary Series (Colorado Springs, CO: Chariot Victor Pub., 1998), 123.

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**A family legacy (Gen. 10:1–32)** This chapter is known as “The Table of Nations” and is unique in the annals of ancient history. The purpose of the chapter is given at the beginning (v. 1) and the end (v. 32): to explain how the earth was repopulated after the Flood by the descendants of the three sons of Noah.

Japheth is the ancestor of the Gentile nations who located north and west of the land of Canaan. These would be the distant nations, the countries that represented the “outer limits” of civilization for the average Old Testament Jew (Ps. 72:8–10).

*Ham’s descendants (vv. 6–20).* Cush is ancient Ethiopia (not the modern nation), Mizraim is Egypt, and Put may be Libya. We’ve already touched upon the peoples of Canaan. The descendants of Ham located in areas we’d identify today as Egypt, Palestine, the Sudan, Saudi Arabia, and Yemen.

At this point in the listing there’s a “parenthesis” to discuss a famous man, Nimrod, the founder of a great empire (vv. 8–12). He’s mentioned because the nations he founded played an important part in the history of Israel, and also because one of them (Babel) is discussed in the next section of Genesis.

The image of Nimrod in the text isn’t that of a sportsman hunting game but rather of a tyrant ruthlessly conquering men and establishing an empire. He built four cities in Shinar (Babylonia) and four more in Assyria. Both Babylon and Assyria became the enemies of Israel and were used of God to chasten His disobedient people.

*God has a purpose for the nations to fulfill.* The account in Genesis 9:24–11:32 makes it clear that God’s chosen nation was Israel. From chapter 12 on, Israel will be center stage in the narrative. But God also used Egypt, Babylon, Assyria, Media-Persia, and Rome to accomplish His purposes with reference to the Jewish people. God can use pagan rulers like Nebuchadnezzar, Cyrus, Darius, and even Augustus Caesar.