

Nations from Noah
Genesis 10, March 31st 2024

Everybody likes a good origin story; those tales that trace the rise of a famous hero or infamous villain: *Kalel's* evacuation from the dying planet Krypton before becoming Superman; Peter Parker's radioactive spider bite that transformed him into Spiderman, or Smeagol's mutation into the covetous, cave-dwelling Gollum. But one of the greatest & oldest origin stories is that of Arthur. As the story goes, Arthur and his magical mentor, Merlin, were on a quest in search of the mythical sword, Excalibur. One night, they came to a moon-lit lake and saw protruding from the midst of the water, an arm clad in white silk holding Excalibur. It was the enchantress, the Lady of the Lake, who gave the sword to Arthur, and with it the authority to rule Britain as king. Though Monty Python's critique was spot on ("*Strange women, lying in ponds, distributing swords is no basis for a system of government*") the story is delightful, nonetheless.

At its heart, Genesis 10 is an epic origin story. But unlike those I've just mention, this account is not a story born of human imagination, but a historical record given by divine inspiration. And unlike other origin stories, Gen.10 is not biographical, illuminating the past of 1 person, but ethnographical, revealing the source of the world's kaleidoscopic ethnicities, cultures, and nations from Noah.

Last week, we considered the final, *cringeworthy*, episode of Noah's life as he fell just before reaching the finish line. He got drunk. He got naked. And he fell asleep in his tent only to be discovered by his son Ham who, after sinfully reveling in his father's shame, went and told his brothers Shem & Japheth. But they were gracious and protected Noah's dignity by refusing to look at him and covering him up. When Noah woke and learned what had happened, he issued blessings and curses that would set the course of human history. Even here, in Gen 10, we see those blessings and curses being brought to bear. And we learn that ***God directs the course of human history***. Tonight, we'll sketch the lines of Noah's three sons and the distinct promise shaping each.

In Japheth's line, we find ***the promise of deliverance***. *Children, if you could live anywhere, other than Statesboro of course, where would you want to live? Maybe you hear the Rocky Mountains calling? Some of you might long for the thick forests of Appalachia or the historic streets of some old city?* Still some of you might, like the Japhethites, head for the coast (v5). You can almost see the Japhethites with their sun-screened noses, tank tops, sandal-tans, rolling-coolers and boogie boards caravanning their way to the beach.

Now, from Statesboro, we go east to reach the coast. But the Japhethites would have traveled west from maybe from modern Turkey, settling along the Mediterranean coast (Balkan, Italian, Iberian) and northward into the European interior. As they spread, the sovereign promise of God spread with them: the promise that they would one day dwell in the tents of Shem (***Gen 9:27***). That is, they would be mercifully ingrafted into Shem and included in the salvation which God would bring forth from Shem's chosen line. That promise weighed heavily upon Isaiah who looked forward to the Savior of the World who would come not only for Israel but for the coastlands too through wandering apostles and missionaries: ***Is 66:18-19*** "...the time is coming to gather all nations & tongues. And they shall come and shall see my glory, and I will set a sign among them. And from them I will send survivors to the nations, to Tarshish, Pul, and Lud... to Tubal and Javan, to the coastlands far away, that have not heard my fame or seen my glory. And they shall declare my glory among the nations."

In the 5th century, a boy named Patrick was kidnapped by pirates and taken to Ireland where he was enslaved for 6 years. But during his imprisonment, Patrick repented of his sin and surrendered his life to Christ. One night, he escaped onboard a ship sailing for Britain. He was

free! Or so he thought. But the Lord so burdened his heart for the lost island that he eventually returned as a missionary and for 40 years, preached the gospel unto the conversion of the nation. He remembered, “It was not any grace in me, but God that put this earnest care into my heart, that I should be one of the hunters or fishers whom long ago God foreshowed would come in the last days.” His evangelistic zeal was fueled by the promise of deliverance God made to Japheth.

Many of you (though by God’s gracious provision, not all) trace our ancestry back to Europe, the land of Japheth. My friends, look around! *Do you know where you are?* You are in the Church of Jesus Christ, House of Jacob, Temple of the Living God, Tabernacle of Jehovah, the Tent of Shem. *You* are living proof that God keeps his promises. Confidence in God’s promises-keeping-power ought to make us bold witnesses for Christ. *But when was the last time you told someone the old, old story of Jesus and his love? “But I’m not eloquent! I don’t know the Bible as well as I should! I can’t defeat the atheist’s arguments!” Do you know what your unsaved neighbor needs most?* They need you: to love them enough to serve them in Christian kindness; to be willing to risk rejection by inviting them to church; to risk offending them by telling them that Jesus died to save them from their sins; to trust that God keeps his promises and is filling heaven by the faithful, not the flawless, witness of his people. *Who is someone in your life that needs to hear the gospel? Will you tell them about Jesus this week? If you don’t, who will?*

As we move to Ham’s line, we see **the promise of destruction**. As boys, my brother and I loved to watch the Batman show from the 60’s with Adam West. *Do you remember that intro?* Waves of villains were unleashed on Batman and Robin. And in a single frame we see the Joker, Penguin, & Catwoman closing in! But then with a Pow! Sok! Bif! Blap! Batman and Robin sent them careening through the air, defeated. So too, in these verses (6-20), we see all the enemies of Israel, the bad guys of the Bible, unleashed in a single frame: Egypt, Canaan, Philistines, Assyria, Babylon. The rest of the Old Testament is, in some sense, the story of the warfare between the cursed line of Ham and the covenant line of Shem; a continuation of the war which began in Eden between the Seed of the Serpent and the Seed of the Woman. As the Japhetites traveled west into Europe, the Hamites moved south into the Middle East & Africa. *Now does that mean that today, people of African or ME descent are cursed?* Of course not... no more than the rest of the children of Adam. The promise that Canaan would be subjugated by his brothers finds it’s social & political fulfillment in Israel’s Conquest of the promised Land. Throughout the OT we see glimmers of the future inclusion of all gentiles in the Covenant of Grace & Canaanites being engrafted into Israel (Rahab, Ruth, Naaman, the city of Nineveh).

Notice that Ham’s line is marked by power. To show this, Moses, the inspired author of Genesis, does something we’ve seen before in Gen 4&5. He allows us to taste the flavor of Ham’s line by offering a us sample. He picks out and holds up to us Nimrod (8). Nimrod was “a mighty man on the earth.” *Does that sound familiar?* Sounds like the Nephilim of **Gen 6**, those monstrous men who filled the earth with terror before the flood. Like the Nephilim of old Nimrod was a violent dictator whose evil genius gave rise to Assyria which would conquer the N-Kingdom of Israel & Babylon which would conquer the S-Kingdom Judah.

But Ham’s line wasn’t just powerful... it was prosperous. As Moses hones in on the line of Canaan he is careful to trace their territorial holdings(**v19**). We’re surprised to read that the land of the cursed line is anything but cursed. That holy land, that privileged property, is the geographic center of the rest of the OT. It is the good, broad land flowing with milk and honey. Before it was the Land of Promise it was the Land of Canaan... cursed Canaan.

Why do the wicked seem to have it all? Why do the ungodly hold all the power, heap all the prosperity, and enjoy all the pleasures this world has to offer? Why is my dishonest coworker promoted while I’m struggling to pay the bills? Why does the immoral woman conceive so easily

when my husband & I have been praying for a child for so long? Why do my unbelieving neighbors seem so effortlessly wealthy and happy? Why is the cruel bully in my class so popular while I'm so lonely. Asaph voiced the same frustrations: **Ps73:2-3, 16-19** "But as for me, my feet had almost stumbled, my steps had nearly slipped. For I was envious of the arrogant when I saw the prosperity of the wicked... But when I thought how to understand this, it seemed to me a wearisome task, until I went into the sanctuary of God; then I discerned their end. Truly you set them in slippery places; you make them fall to ruin. How they are destroyed in a moment, swept away utterly by terrors!" Asaph learned that God's promise of destruction is oftentimes wrapped in the curse of comfort. *Assyria? Babylon? Canaan? Grand in their day... but in the end they were little more than sandcastles in the surf of history.*

That means, you may have everything this world has to offer ... but if you don't Christ you have nothing. Inversely, it means you may have nothing of the world but if you have Christ, you have everything. *Do you believe that? Are you trusting in your power & prosperity as sign of God's favor though you've never been reconciled to God through the cross of Christ?* Don't be deceived! Remember the rich man of Jesus' parable whose fields produced so plentifully he had to build extra barns to hold the produce. Then he said to himself, "Soul, you have ample goods laid up for many years; relax, eat, drink, be merry." But God said to him, "Fool! This night your soul is required of you, and the things you have prepared, whose will they be?" So is the one who lays up treasure for himself and is not rich toward God."(Luke12:19-21). Repent of your sinful apathy, self-righteousness, & idolatry and run to Jesus who makes us rich toward God.

Finally, in Shem's line we see the **promise of a deliverer**. Look back to the blessing of Shem in Genesis 9:26. *Do you notice anything unique?* It's not, "blessed be Shem," but rather, "blessed be **the LORD, the God of Shem.**" The LORD is the special possession of Shem & Shem is the special possession of the LORD- Jehovah, Yahweh- Covenant name.

These descendants of Shem through Eber, from whom the name Hebrew may have originated, traveled east into Arabia and Asia. As we journey through Genesis, we'll witness the unfailing Covenant love of the Lord to Shem's descendants, Abraham, Isaac, Jacob & Judah. But that love can't be contained in Genesis, it finds Moses, Joshua, Gideon, Boaz, Jesse, David, Solomon, Uzziah, Manasseh & Joseph before reaching its full and perfect expression in the promised deliverer, Jesus Christ, the Lamb of God who takes away the sins not only of Shemites but of the elect of God from every nation. John said so in his first letter, "He is the propitiation for our sins, and not for ours only but also for the sins of the whole world" (1Jn2:2). They flood waters may have blotted out the sinful throngs of unbelieving humanity, but something else survived with Noah on the ark, something hideous & monstrous: the curse & corruption of Adam's sin. The flood couldn't fix the universal problem of sin. Sin needs another solvent. That is only the blood, the sinless blood, the substitutionary blood, the atoning blood, the justifying blood of Jesus which on the cross was "poured out for many for the forgiveness of sin" (Matt 26:28).

A final question remains which Gen 10 can help us answer: How many races are there? It shocked me too when a church janitor named Harry asked me that 10 years ago. *I didn't know how to answer.* I tried to remember all of the bubbles on my standardized testing form from HS: "Asian, African, Caucasian, Latino, Pacific Islander" He stopped me & asked again, "**How many human races are there?** There's only 1 human race." **Acts 17:26** says that "[God] made from one man every nation of mankind to live on all the face of the earth." If that's true, racial essentialism is a lie from the pit of hell the godly must reject with vitriol. RE holds that a person's skin color is the most significant and determinative thing about them. The RE assigns merit or demerit to a person based on their skin color. This is racist. Biblically speaking this is the sin of partiality that must never be named among the godly. In society and especially in the church, we must never define & divide ourselves by something so superficial as the melanin of our skin or where we're from. **Gal3:27-29** "For as many of you as were baptized into Christ have put on Christ. There is neither Jew nor Greek, there is neither slave nor free, there is no male and female, for you are all one in Christ Jesus." Amen.