THE PENTATEUCH PART I: GENESIS  
LESSON 7: Genesis 9:18- 12:9  
From Noah to the Call of Abraham: Obedience to God is the Path to Salvation

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El Shaddai'God Almighty,

You called father Abraham to leave his homeland to journey down pathways to an unknown land.  It was because Abraham had faith in Your promises, Lord, that he became the bearer of the "promised seed," the father of a great nation, and a blessing to all humanity'promises that he never realized in his lifetime.  Give us the courage and faith of father Abraham to follow You down whatever path You determine is Your will for our lives, so that at the end of our journey we may follow in the footsteps of Abraham, "receiving the same blessing as Abraham, the man of faith" (Gal 3:8).  Beloved Holy Spirit, guide us in our study of the post-flood new world order and Abraham's call to faith. We pray in the name of God the Father, the Son, and the Holy Spirit.  Amen.

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*I am coming to gather every nation and every language.  They will come to witness my glory.  I shall give them a sign and send some of their survivors to the nations: to Tarshish, Put, Lud, Meshech, Tubal and Javan, to the distant coasts and islands that have never heard of me or seen my glory.* [Isaiah 66:18-19a](http://www.usccb.org/nab/bible/isaiah/isaiah66.htm#v18)

*Abraham, the great ancestor of a host of nations, no one was ever his equal in glory.  He observed the Law of the Most High, and entered into a covenant with him.  He confirmed the covenant in his own flesh, and proved himself faithful under ordeal.  The Lord therefore promised him on oath to bless the nations through his descendants, to multiply him like the dust on the ground, to exalt his descendants like the stars, and to give them the land as their heritage, from one sea to the other, from the River to the ends of the earth.* [Sirach 44:19(20)-21(23)](http://www.usccb.org/nab/bible/sirach/sirach44.htm#v19)

Our lesson continues with the story of Noah's family, and the biblical narrative continues with God in His role as Creator and Master of man's history.  The emphasis on the biblical narrative as history is expressed in the repeated phrase "this is the *toledot*'the history" ([Gen 2:4a](http://www.usccb.org/nab/bible/genesis/genesis2.htm#v4); [5:1](http://www.usccb.org/nab/bible/genesis/genesis5.htm#v1); [6:9](http://www.usccb.org/nab/bible/genesis/genesis6.htm#v9)), which leads to the *toledot* as an historical genealogical record in [Genesis 10:1-11:31](http://www.usccb.org/nab/bible/genesis/genesis10.htm#v1), listing the 70 nations of the post-flood peoples of the earth and the genealogy of the line of the "promised seed" preserved in the descendants Noah's son Shem.  It is the second list of Shem's descendants in [11:10-26](http://www.usccb.org/nab/bible/genesis/genesis11.htm#v10) that will reach its climax in naming Abraham, the father of the old covenant people of God.

Scripture records ten generations between Adam and his righteous descendant Noah and ten generations between Noah's righteous son Shem and his descendant Abram/Abraham.  Abraham will become the father of the family from whom God will call forth the "promised seed of the woman" that was prophesied in [Genesis 3:15](http://www.usccb.org/nab/bible/genesis/genesis3.htm#v15).   It was to Abraham that God promised all the nations of the world were to be blessed through his descendants ([Gen 22:18](http://www.usccb.org/nab/bible/genesis/genesis22.htm#v18)).  St. Paul wrote that all who believe in Christ are the heirs of Abraham: *And simply by being Christ's, you are that progeny of Abraham, the heirs named in the promise* ([Gal 4:29](http://www.usccb.org/nab/bible/galatians/galatians4.htm#v29))*.* All who acknowledge Jesus as the only begotten Son of God and the promised Redeemer-Messiah are the heirs of father Abraham and inheritors of the world-wide blessing, called to be united as one family in the universal Church of Christ Jesus (CCC [830-31](http://www.scborromeo.org/ccc/p123a9p3.htm#830), [836-38](http://www.scborromeo.org/ccc/p123a9p3.htm#836)).

There are seven interesting points of comparison between God calling Noah out of the safety of the Ark to step out into an unknown world and God calling Abram out of the safety of Ur of the Chaldees to step out into an unknown land (brackets indicate literal translation):

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| Noah in [Genesis 8:15-9:9](http://www.usccb.org/nab/bible/genesis/genesis8.htm#v15) | Abram in [Genesis 12:1-7](http://www.usccb.org/nab/bible/genesis/genesis12.htm#v1) |
| 1. *Then God said to Noah*  ([Gen 8:15](http://www.usccb.org/nab/bible/genesis/genesis8.htm#v15)) | 1. *Yahweh said to Abram*  ([Gen 12:1](http://www.usccb.org/nab/bible/genesis/genesis12.htm#v1)) |
| 2. *Come out from the Ark* ([Gen 8:16](http://www.usccb.org/nab/bible/genesis/genesis8.htm#v16)) | 2. *Leave [go out from] your land* ([Gen 12:1](http://www.usccb.org/nab/bible/genesis/genesis12.htm#v1)) |
| 3. *So Noah came out*  ([Gen 8:18](http://www.usccb.org/nab/bible/genesis/genesis8.htm#v18)) | 3. *So Abram went [out]* ([Gen 12:4](http://www.usccb.org/nab/bible/genesis/genesis12.htm#v4)) |
| 4. *Then Noah built an altar to Yahweh* ([Gen 8:20](http://www.usccb.org/nab/bible/genesis/genesis8.htm#v20)) | 4. *And Abram built an altar to Yahweh* ([Gen 12:7](http://www.usccb.org/nab/bible/genesis/genesis12.htm#v7)) |
| 5. *God blessed Noah*  ([Gen 9:1](http://www.usccb.org/nab/bible/genesis/genesis9.htm#v1)) | 5. God said: *'And I will bless you'* ([Gen 12:2](http://www.usccb.org/nab/bible/genesis/genesis12.htm#v2)) |
| 6. *Breed, multiply and fill the earth* ([Gen 9:1](http://www.usccb.org/nab/bible/genesis/genesis9.htm#v1)) | 6. *And I shall make you a great nation* ([Gen 12:2](http://www.usccb.org/nab/bible/genesis/genesis12.htm#v2)) |
| 7. *I am now establishing  my covenant with you and your descendants to come [your seed]*([Gen 9:9](http://www.usccb.org/nab/bible/genesis/genesis9.htm#v9)) | 7. *I will give this country to your progeny  [your seed]* ([Gen 12:7](http://www.usccb.org/nab/bible/genesis/genesis12.htm#v7)) |

Both Noah and Abraham represented a new beginning and a turning point in God's plan for man's salvation.  Both men received God's special blessings and the gift of covenant union that was to be passed down to their descendants.  The lesson that was revealed in the story of Noah: that salvation comes through obedience to God, is repeated in the call of Abraham.

**Please read Genesis 9:18-29: Noah and His Sons**  
**9:18*The sons of Noah who came out of the ark were Shem, Ham and Japheth'Ham being the father of Canaan.* 19*These three where Noah's sons, and from these the whole earth was peopled.* 20*Noah, a tiller of the soil, was the first to plant the vine.* 21*He drank some of the wine, and while he was drunk, he lay uncovered in his tent.* 22*Ham, father of Canaan, saw his father naked and told his two brothers outside.* 23*Shem and Japheth took the cloak and they both put it over their shoulders, and walking backwards, covered their father's nakedness; they kept their faces turned away, and they did not look at their father naked.* 24*When Noah awoke from his stupor he learned what his youngest son had done to him,* 25*and said: Accursed be Canaan, he shall be his brothers' meanest slave.* 26*He added "Blessed be Yahweh, God of Shem, let Canaan be his slave!* 27*May God make a space for Japheth, may he live in the tents of Shem, and let Canaan be his slave!* 28*After the flood Noah lived three hundred and fifty years.* 29*In all, Noah's life lasted nine hundred and fifty years; then he died.***

**Genesis 9:18:***The sons of Noah who came out of the ark were Shem, Ham and Japheth'Ham being the father of Canaan.* This is the fourth time the sons of Noah have been mentioned according to their birth order ([Gen 5:32](http://www.usccb.org/nab/bible/genesis/genesis5.htm#v32); [6:10](http://www.usccb.org/nab/bible/genesis/genesis6.htm#v10); [7:13](http://www.usccb.org/nab/bible/genesis/genesis7.htm#v13); [9:18](http://www.usccb.org/nab/bible/genesis/genesis9.htm#v18)).  But for the first time Noah's second son, Ham, is identified by his relationship to his son Canaan.  Canaan will become a mysterious central figure in this part of the narrative.  His name will be mentioned nine times in Scripture ([Gen 9:18](http://www.usccb.org/nab/bible/genesis/genesis9.htm#v18), [22](http://www.usccb.org/nab/bible/genesis/genesis9.htm#v22), [25](http://www.usccb.org/nab/bible/genesis/genesis9.htm#v25), [26](http://www.usccb.org/nab/bible/genesis/genesis9.htm#v26), [27](http://www.usccb.org/nab/bible/genesis/genesis9.htm#v27); [10:6](http://www.usccb.org/nab/bible/genesis/genesis10.htm#v6), [15](http://www.usccb.org/nab/bible/genesis/genesis10.htm#v15); [1 Chr 1:8](http://www.usccb.org/nab/bible/1chronicles/1chronicles1.htm#v8), [13](http://www.usccb.org/nab/bible/1chronicles/1chronicles1.htm#v13)).

**Question:** What comparison can you make between Adam in exile from the garden and Noah in the post-flood world?  
**Answer:**

1. Just as Adam's son fathered the humanity of the pre-flood world, now the sons of Noah, the new Adam, will father the post-flood world.
2. Both Adam and Noah became tillers of the earth.
3. Eating fruit made both men vulnerable to sin and each experienced a fall from grace.
4. Both men became estranged from a son: Adam's son sinned in killing a brother and Noah's son sinned against his father.
5. Both Adam and Noah had a righteous son through whom God continued His covenant relationship and both Seth and Shem were the bearers of the promise of the "promised seed."

[**Genesis 9:21**](http://www.usccb.org/nab/bible/genesis/genesis9.htm#v22)**:** *He drank some of the wine, and while he was drunk, he lay uncovered in his tent.*

**Question:** What is the significance of Noah's nakedness in [Genesis 9:21](http://www.usccb.org/nab/bible/genesis/genesis9.htm#v21)?  
**Answer:** Since the fall of Adam, nakedness has become a symbol of sin.

Noah's sin of drunkenness was an abuse of God blessing of the fertility of the land and man's domination over that fertility.  St. John Chrysostom (d. 207) warned: *You see, dreadful sins arise not from wine as such but from intemperate attitudes of human depravity that undermine the benefit that should naturally come from it* (*Homilies on Genesis 29.10*).  But this passage may also be a warning that submitting to sin may make one more vulnerable to other, more dangerous sins.

**Genesis 9:22-23:** 22*Ham, father of Canaan, saw his father naked and told his two brothers outside.* 23*Shem and Japheth took the cloak and they both put it over their shoulders, and walking backwards, covered their father's nakedness; they kept their faces turned away, and they did not look at their father naked.*

From the information supplied by the text it is difficult to determine exactly what happened in Noah's tent and what was the sin or sins.  Noah's sin was to become drunk on wine, abusing God's blessing in providing abundant grapes.  But what was Ham's sin?  The text provides three interesting clues:

1. When Ham told his brothers about their father's "nakedness" they were standing outside the tent, which suggests that Ham had been inside his father's tent.
2. The coat that was meant to cover Noah's nakedness was outside the tent with Ham.
3. Ham is identified as the father of Canaan, suggesting that Canaan played a part in these events.

Ham or Canaan must have uncovered Noah, exposing Noah's nakedness, perhaps exposing Noah's wife, and one of them brought Noah's coat out of the tent.

**Question:** What does a coat symbolize in Scripture? See in [Gen 37:3-4](http://www.usccb.org/nab/bible/genesis/genesis37.htm#v3).  
**Answer:** In the Bible the coat can be a sign of authority.  Jacob gave Joseph a coat as a sign of his status over his brothers. If the coat in this passage is a symbol of Noah's authority, it was stripped from him, leaving him naked, and perhaps serving as a sign that Noah was stripped of his authority over the human family.

There may be another more sinister aspect to Noah being stripped of his coat and left uncovered and naked.  Some Bible scholars have suggested that Ham (or Canaan) sodomized Noah inside the tent.  Other scholars have suggested that Ham (or Canaan), like Absalom, sexually assaulted Noah's wife (see"Noah's Nakedness and the Curse on Canaan ([Genesis 9:20-27](http://www.usccb.org/nab/bible/genesis/genesis9.htm#v20)),*"* Scott Hahn and John Bergsma, *Journal of Biblical Literature 124, no. 1, Spring 2005,* pages 25-40*).*  In [2 Samuel 16:20-22](http://www.usccb.org/nab/bible/2samuel/2samuel16.htm#v20)  David's son Absalom, in an attempt to solidify the political and military defeat of his father and the usurping of his father's sovereignty over Israel, publically slept with David's concubines to establish that he commanded all that David had once possessed.  In Leviticus the laws governing prohibited sexual intercourse are expressed as to literally "not uncover nakedness" ([Lev 18:1-30](http://www.usccb.org/nab/bible/leviticus/leviticus18.htm#v1)).  Is it possible that Ham was attempting to usurp his father's authority by demeaning his father sexually? Ham's sin may have been the same display of usurping his father's authority and dominion over the post-flood human family.  The other possibility is that Ham's son Canaan was a co-conspirator or perhaps the more active partner in a sexual sin/ attempt to usurp power by the "uncovered nakedness" of Noah.  In any case, in [Exodus 20:26](http://www.usccb.org/nab/bible/exodus/exodus20.htm#v26) Yahweh will place boundaries on exposing one's nakedness before God and before men in the liturgy of worship.  The significance of this command is that the priests, who stand before God as examples of redeemed man, must cover their nakedness as man is expected to take appropriate measures to cover sin.  Those who boldly expose their "nakedness"/sins flaunt God's sovereignty and authority' foolishly having no fear of God.

St. Cyprian saw Noah's vulnerability at the hand of a wicked man as a sign of Christ's passion: *For we find this even in Genesis also, in respect of the sacrament prefigured in Noah.  That he drank wine was to them a precursor and figure of the Lord's passion.  Noah was made drink by this wine, was made naked in his household, was lying down with his thighs naked and exposed, and the nakedness of the father was observed by his second son and was told abroad but was covered by two, the eldest and the youngest .. [..].  It is enough for us simply to embrace the understanding that Noah set forth a type of the future truth.  Noah did not drink water but wine and thus expressed in advance the figure of the passion of the Lord* (*Letters 63.2-3;* quoted from *Ancient Christian Commentary on Scripture, Old Testament, vol. I,* page 158).

The elder and younger sons, Shem and Japheth, did not cooperate in their brother's sin against their father in his intoxicated and naked condition.  They restored their father's dignity and authority by shielding their eyes and covering Noah with his coat of authority.  If this was a case of betrayal, it would account for Noah's anti-blessing on Canaan'if Canaan, the youngest son of Ham ([Gen 10:6](http://www.usccb.org/nab/bible/genesis/genesis10.htm#v6)), was a party to or the instigator of the sin against Noah, Canaan would be disinherited and would not receive a son's (grandson's) portion of the father's possessions/blessings.  Scripture records that a child can not be held responsible for a parent's personal sins ([Ezekiel 18:14-20](http://www.usccb.org/nab/bible/ezekiel/ezekiel18.htm#v14)); therefore, Canaan's judgment must be accounted to his own sins.

Up to this point, the birth order of Shem, Ham, and Japheth has been established four times in [Genesis 5:32](http://www.usccb.org/nab/bible/genesis/genesis5.htm#v32); [6:10](http://www.usccb.org/nab/bible/genesis/genesis6.htm#v10); [7:13](http://www.usccb.org/nab/bible/genesis/genesis7.htm#v13); [9:15](http://www.usccb.org/nab/bible/genesis/genesis9.htm#v15), and yet Genesis 9:24-26 reads: 24*When Noah awoke from his stupor he learned what his youngest son had done to him,* 25*and said: Accursed be Canaan, he shall be his brothers' meanest slave.* 26*He added "Blessed be Yahweh, God of Shem, let Canaan be his slave!*   In Hebrew the word "brothers" is often used in the sense of "kinsmen." Since Ham is always listed as the middle son, the "youngest son" in Genesis 9:25 cannot be Ham.  The genealogical record of Ham's sons in Genesis 10:6 lists Canaan as Ham's youngest son.  The personal pronoun "his" in 9:25 must refer to Ham: it was what *his (Ham's)* *youngest son* *had done to him (Noah)* that resulted in the judgment on Canaan who was condemned to rank in a subservient position to his kinsmen*.* Canaan became the father of nations that united sexual immorality to their ritual pagan worship through sexual orgies, sexual abuse of children, and other perversions.([1](http://www.agapebiblestudy.com/genesis/Lesson_7.htm" \l "end1))

**Genesis 9:26-29:** 26*He added "Blessed be Yahweh, God of Shem, let Canaan be his slave!* 27*May God make a space for Japheth, may he live in the tents of Shem, and let Canaan be his slave!* 28*After the flood Noah lived three hundred and fifty years.* 29*In all, Noah's life lasted nine hundred and fifty years; then he died.*

We do not know from the narrative when the incident of Noah's disgrace took place, but in Scripture the patriarchs give blessings to their sons at the end of their lives, when death is near ([Gen 27:1-4](http://www.usccb.org/nab/bible/genesis/genesis27.htm#v1), [10](http://www.usccb.org/nab/bible/genesis/genesis27.htm#v10); [48:21-49:33](http://www.usccb.org/nab/bible/genesis/genesis48.htm#v21)).  The youngest son's blessing is tied to his obedience to his eldest brother, Shem.  The line *may he live (dwell) in the tents of Shem* could also read: "may he (Japheth) dwell in the tabernacle of Shem."  It is the same Hebrew word that will be used for the "tent of testimony" designated for worship in the Sinai Covenant (*Interlinear Bible: Hebrew-English* page 22, #168; *Brown-Driver-Briggs,* pages 13-14; i.e., [Ex 26:9](http://www.usccb.org/nab/bible/exodus/exodus26.htm#v9); [27:41](http://www.usccb.org/nab/bible/exodus/exodus27.htm#v41); etc.)

Noah defined Shem as his heir and the mediator of the covenant God formed with Noah and creation.  In that role, Shem became God's high priest in offering sacrifice.  Shem will bear the authority of his father and the youngest son, Japheth, will look to Shem as his leader and benefactor, while Canaan will be completely subservient to Shem's authority without any share in the inheritance.  It is significant that for the first time in Scripture a man is identified as "God's man": *Blessed be Yahweh, God of Shem* ([Gen 9:26a](http://www.usccb.org/nab/bible/genesis/genesis9.htm#v26)).  In Hebrew Shem's name means "name."  Shem will be the bearer of God's name and His representative to the new humanity descended through Noah. Watch for a repetition of the Hebrew word "shem" (name) as the narrative continues.  Jewish oral tradition identifies Shem, the covenant bearer and God's representative to humanity, as the righteous king of Salem: Melchizedek (melech = king; zedek = righteousness); see the *Babylonian Talmud, N'darim 32b;* and most modern Jewish Bible study notes: i.e., *Tanach* (Stone edition), note on page 29; and *The Jewish New Testament Commentary,* page 679.

**Question:** What is the significance of the differences between Shem and Ham/ Canaan?  See [Genesis 3:15](http://www.usccb.org/nab/bible/genesis/genesis3.htm#v15).  
**Answer:** Noah's descendants carry the line of the "promised seed" but they are also capable of producing the "seed of the serpent."  The earth was cleansed of sin in the Great Flood, but sin persists on the earth and it will take supernatural intervention to conquer sin's hold on mankind.

**Please read Genesis 10:1-32: The Toledot of Noah's Sons'the 70 Nations**  
10:**1*These are the descendants [toledot] of Noah's sons, Shem, Ham and Japheth, to whom sons were born after the flood:* 2*Japheth's sons: Gomer, Magog, the Medes, Javan, Tubal, Meshech, Tiras.* 3*Gomer's sons: Ashkenaz, Riphath, Togarmah.* 4*Javan's sons: Elisha, Tarshish, the Kittim, the Dananites.* 5*From these came the dispersal to the islands of the nations.  These were Japheth's sons, in their respective countries, each with its own language, by clan and nation.* 6*Ham's sons: Cush, Mizraim, Put, Canaan.* 7*Cush's sons: Seba, Havilah, Sabtah, Raamah, Sabteca.  Raamah's sons: Sheba, Dedan.* 8*Cush fathered Nimrod who was the first potentate on earth.* 9*He was a mighty hunter in the eyes (face) of Yahweh, hence the saying, 'Like Nimrod, a mighty hunter in the eyes (face) of Yahweh.'* 10*The mainstays of his empire were Babel, Erech and Accad, all of them in the land of Shinar.* 11*From this country came Asshur, and he built Nineveh, Rehoboth-Ir, Calah,* 12*and Resen between Nineveh and Calah (this being the capital).* 13*Mizraim fathered the people of Lud, of Anam, Lehab, Naphtuh,* 14*Pathros, Casluh and Caphtor, from which the Philistines came.* 15*Canaan fathered Sidon, his first-born, then Heth,* 16*and the Jebusites, the Amorites, Girgashites,* 17*Hivites, Arkites, Sinites,* 18*Arvadites, Zemarites, and Hamathites.  Later, the Canaanite clans spread out.* 19*The Canaanite frontier stretched from Sidon all the way to Gerar near Gaza, and all the way to Sodom, Gomorrah, Adamah and Zeboiim near Lesha.* 20*These were Ham's sons, by clans and languages, by countries and nations.* 21*Shem too fathered sons, being ancestor of all the sons of Eber (Heber) and Japheth's elder brother.* 22*Shem's sons: Elam, Asshur, Arpachshad, Lud, Aram.* 23*Aram's sons: Uz, Hul, Gether and Marsh.* 24*Arpachshad fathered Shelah, and Shelah fathered Eber.* 25*To Eber (Heber) were born two sons: the first was called Peleg, because it was in his time that the earth was divided, and his brother was called Joktan.* 26*Joktan fathered Almondad, Sheleph, Hazarmaveth, Jerah,* 27*Hadoram, Uzal, Diklah,* 28*Obal, Abima-El, Sheba,* 29*Ophir, Havilah, Jobab; all these were sons of Joktan.* 30*They occupied a stretch of country from Mesha all the way to Sephar, the eastern mountain range.* 31*These were Shem's sons, by clans and languages, by countries and nations.* 32*Such were the clans of Noah's descendants, listed by descent and nation.  From them, other nations branched out on earth after the flood.***

**Genesis 10:1:** *These are the descendants of Noah's sons, Shem, Ham and Japheth, to whom sons were born after the flood:* In Hebrew the word sons, *benim,* and its synonyms have an expanded meaning.  "Sons" can mean clans, territories, languages, and nations descended from one ancestor.  These expanded meanings are reflected in the list of 70 nations in which some of names in the list are persons (Japheth, Nimrod, Canaan, etc.), with other names being groups of peoples (the Medes, Ludites, etc.), and others are place names/people (Mizraim = Egypt, Sidon, Sheba, Asshur, etc.).  The list of the descendants of Adam through Noah and his sons is repeated in [1 Chronicles 1:1-29](http://www.usccb.org/nab/bible/1chronicles/1chronicles1.htm#v1).

In the order of nations, Japheth, the youngest of Noah's three sons and his descendants are listed first, reversing the birth order of the sons of Noah and placing the important list of the faithful remnant of humanity that carries the "promised seed" last in the list of 70 nations.  Shem's list of descendants will be intersected by the narrative of the Tower of Babel in [Genesis 11:1-9](http://www.usccb.org/nab/bible/genesis/genesis11.htm#v1) and then will continue again in [11:10-26](http://www.usccb.org/nab/bible/genesis/genesis11.htm#v10), reaching its climax in naming Abram/Abraham: the bearer of the "promised seed."  Philo of Alexandria warned that the order of the sons in the Table of Nations does not mean that Japheth was the eldest son and Shem was the youngest.  He pointed out the previous naming of the three sons of Noah where Shem was always mentioned first as the eldest and the heir, and he insisted that the list of names in the Table of Nations were organized in reverse order to give Shem's descendants prominence at the conclusion of the toledot (Philo, "Questions and Answers on Genesis II," *The Works of Philo,* page 839).

**Noah's Sons Were the Fathers of the Seventy Nations**

**Japheth's sons and their descendants**: (\* = a people not an individual)

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| 1. Gomer's sons | 2. Magog | 3. the Medes\* | 4. Javan's sons | 5. Tubal | 6. Meshech | 7. Tiras |
| 8. Ashkenaz |  |  | 11. Eishah |  |  |  |
| 9. Riphath |  |  | 12. Tarshish |  |  |  |
| 10. Togarmah |  |  | 13. the Kittim\* |  |  |  |
|  |  |  | 14. the Dananites/ Rhodanites\* |  |  |  |

**The Sons of Japheth:**  The list begins with those descendants of Noah who would inhabit lands that extended to the fringes of the ancient known world.  Seven sons and seven grandsons of Japheth are listed. Seven is one of the "perfect" numbers, signifying "completeness." This does not suggest that this is the complete list of all Japheth's descendants.  The intention is not to give an exhaustive list'the names signify a representation of the complete list.  These men represent what will become the vast "Gentile world" to the north, west, and east.  Several of these names are listed in Isaiah's prophecy of the restoration of the Gentile nations in the Age of the Messiah: *I am coming to gather every nation and every language.  They will come to witness my glory.  I shall give them a sign and send some of their survivors to the nations: to Tarshish, Put, Lud, Meshech, Tubal and Javan, to the distant coasts and islands that have never heard of me or seen my glory.* [Isaiah 66:18-19a](http://www.usccb.org/nab/bible/isaiah/isaiah66.htm#v18)

Japheth's descendants are located more or less in the area of Asia Minor'the land bridge that gave his descendants access to migration into Europe, and the languages their descendants spoke were Indo-European languages.  In addition to information to be gleaned from Sacred Scripture, Flavius Josephus (1st century AD Jewish priest/historian) and to a lesser extent, Philo of Alexandria (1st century AD Jewish theologian and philosopher), provided information what lands were settled by the sons of Noah and their descendants according to oral tradition (Josephus, *Antiquities of the Jews 1.6.1-7.2;* Philo, *Questions and Answers on Genesis II, 80-82*).

**The sons of Japheth:**

1. Gomer: Gomer is associated with Armenia and a nomadic people to the north of the Black sea who occupied Anatolia (modern Turkey) in the 7th century BC.  Josephus identified Gomer with Galatia.
2. Magog: Magog is associated with the peoples originally located on the coast of the Black Sea.  Josephus identified them with the Scythians, a people who occupied lands in central Asia that extended to east of the Caspian Sea and north of the Caucasus range.  Gog is described as a prince of Magog in Ezekiel; the descendants of Meshech and Tubal were cursed by the prophet Ezekiel as enemies of Israel ([Ez 38:2](http://www.usccb.org/nab/bible/ezekiel/ezekiel38.htm" \l "v2), [3](http://www.usccb.org/nab/bible/ezekiel/ezekiel38.htm#v3), [14](http://www.usccb.org/nab/bible/ezekiel/ezekiel38.htm#v14), [16](http://www.usccb.org/nab/bible/ezekiel/ezekiel38.htm#v16), [18](http://www.usccb.org/nab/bible/ezekiel/ezekiel38.htm#v18); [39:1](http://www.usccb.org/nab/bible/ezekiel/ezekiel39.htm#v1), [2](http://www.usccb.org/nab/bible/ezekiel/ezekiel39.htm#v2), [6](http://www.usccb.org/nab/bible/ezekiel/ezekiel39.htm#v6), [11](http://www.usccb.org/nab/bible/ezekiel/ezekiel39.htm#v11), [15](http://www.usccb.org/nab/bible/ezekiel/ezekiel39.htm#v15); and [Rev 20:8](http://www.usccb.org/nab/bible/revelation/revelation20.htm#v8)).  Also see [1 Chr 1:5](http://www.usccb.org/nab/bible/1chronicles/1chronicles1.htm#v5).
3. The Medes:  In Hebrew the Madai were a people of the Iranian plateau, modern northwestern Iran.  In the 6th century BC they united with the Persians to form the Persian Empire.  The Medes are mentioned among those Jews and Gentile converts to the Old Covenant faith who were present to hear St. Peter on the Feast of Pentecost, 30AD, in [Acts 2:9](http://www.usccb.org/nab/bible/acts/acts2.htm#v9) (see [1 Chr 1:5](http://www.usccb.org/nab/bible/1chronicles/1chronicles1.htm#v1); [2 Kgs 17:6](http://www.usccb.org/nab/bible/2kings/2kings17.htm#v6); [18:11](http://www.usccb.org/nab/bible/2kings/2kings18.htm#v11); [Is 21:2](http://www.usccb.org/nab/bible/isaiah/isaiah21.htm#v2); [Jer 25:25](http://www.usccb.org/nab/bible/jeremiah/jeremiah25.htm#v25); [51:11](http://www.usccb.org/nab/bible/jeremiah/jeremiah51.htm#v11), [18](http://www.usccb.org/nab/bible/jeremiah/jeremiah51.htm#v18); [Ez 6:2](http://www.usccb.org/nab/bible/ezekiel/ezekiel6.htm#v2); [Dan 5:28](http://www.usccb.org/nab/bible/daniel/daniel5.htm#v28); [6:9](http://www.usccb.org/nab/bible/daniel/daniel6.htm#v9), [13](http://www.usccb.org/nab/bible/daniel/daniel6.htm#v13); [8:20](http://www.usccb.org/nab/bible/daniel/daniel8.htm#v20); [9:1](http://www.usccb.org/nab/bible/daniel/daniel9.htm#v1)).
4. Javan:  According to Josephus, Javan was the father of the Greeks; a list of his sons in [Gen 10:2-4](http://www.usccb.org/nab/bible/genesis/genesis10.htm#v2) and in [1 Chr 1:5-7](http://www.usccb.org/nab/bible/1chronicles/1chronicles1.htm#v5) has been tied to the names of ancient Greek cities and supports the connection to the Ionian Greeks ([Is 66:19](http://www.usccb.org/nab/bible/isaiah/isaiah66.htm#v19); [Ez 27:13](http://www.usccb.org/nab/bible/ezekiel/ezekiel27.htm#v13), [19](http://www.usccb.org/nab/bible/ezekiel/ezekiel27.htm#v19); [Dan 8:21](http://www.usccb.org/nab/bible/daniel/daniel8.htm#v21); [10:20](http://www.usccb.org/nab/bible/daniel/daniel10.htm#v20); [11:12](http://www.usccb.org/nab/bible/daniel/daniel11.htm#v12); [Joel 4:6](http://www.usccb.org/nab/bible/joel/joel4.htm#v6); [Zec 9:13](http://www.usccb.org/nab/bible/zechariah/zechariah9.htm#v13).
5. Tubal: Josephus identified them as Scythians whose original homeland was in central Asia.  Their lands extended east of the Caspian Sea and north of the Caucasus range.  Ezekiel cursed them as enemies of Israel ([Ez 27:13](http://www.usccb.org/nab/bible/ezekiel/ezekiel27.htm" \l "v13); [38:2](http://www.usccb.org/nab/bible/ezekiel/ezekiel38.htm#v2)), [2 Mac 4:47](http://www.usccb.org/nab/bible/2maccabees/2maccabees4.htm#v47) mentions Scythians who may be Tubal's descendants, and [Col 3:11](http://www.usccb.org/nab/bible/colossians/colossians3.htm#v11) enumerates them with the Gentile peoples who became One in Christ.
6. Meshech: In the Old Testament Meshech is associated with Phrygia, a region in northwest Asia Minor.  It is one of the regions from which Jews and Gentile proselytes came during the pilgrim feast of Pentecost in 30 AD ([Acts 2:10](http://www.usccb.org/nab/bible/acts/acts2.htm#v10)) when they heard St. Peter and Jesus' disciples preach the Gospel of salvation in Acts 2. The most famous king of the Phrygians was King Midas of the "golden touch."  In the first century AD two of the kingdom's most prosperous cities were Laodicea and Colossae, cities evangelized by St. Paul ([Acts 16:6](http://www.usccb.org/nab/bible/acts/acts16.htm#v6); [18:23](http://www.usccb.org/nab/bible/acts/acts18.htm#v23)).
7. Tiras: Josephus identified Tiras' descendants as the Thracians who settled in the southeastern part of the Balkan Peninsula, occupying lands bordered by the Black Sea to the east, the Sea of Marmara to the southeast, the Aegean Sea to the south, and Macedonia to the southwest.

**Japheth's list of seven sons continues with seven grandsons descended through Gomer and Javan** ([Gen 10:3-4](http://www.usccb.org/nab/bible/genesis/genesis10.htm#v3)):

1. Ashkenaz: A son of Gomer was also believed to be a father of the Scythian tribes (originally settled north of the Black Sea).
2. Riphath: A son of Gomer; identification is uncertain. Josephus wrote that his descendants were called Paphlagonians.   Herodotus, the 5th century BC Greek historian/world traveler, recorded that the Paphlagonia was located in the third provincial district of the Persian Empire (*The Landmark Herodotus: The Histories, 3.90.2*)
3. Togarmah: A son of Gomer whose descendants occupied lands somewhere in the region of Armenia; Josephus identified his people as Phrygians.
4. Elishah: A son of Javan; his descendants may have settled Cyprus.
5. Tarshish: A son of Javan.  His descendants are identified by Josephus as settling in Cilicia, the coastal strip of the southeast corner of Asia Minor.  The principal city of Cilicia was St. Paul's birthplace, the city of Tarsus ([Is 23:6](http://www.usccb.org/nab/bible/isaiah/isaiah23.htm#v6), [10](http://www.usccb.org/nab/bible/isaiah/isaiah23.htm#v10);  [66:9](http://www.usccb.org/nab/bible/isaiah/isaiah66.htm#v9); [Ez 27:12](http://www.usccb.org/nab/bible/ezekiel/ezekiel27.htm#v12) mentions riches of trade with Tyre; and [38:13](http://www.usccb.org/nab/bible/ezekiel/ezekiel38.htm#v13) mentions merchants; [Jer 10:9](http://www.usccb.org/nab/bible/jeremiah/jeremiah10.htm#v9); [Ps 72:10](http://www.usccb.org/nab/bible/psalms/psalm72.htm#v10) invites Tarshish and the islands to worship the Messianic king; in [1 Kgs 10:1](http://www.usccb.org/nab/bible/1kings/1kings10.htm#v1) and [Ps 48:7](http://www.usccb.org/nab/bible/psalms/psalm48.htm#v7) Tarshish symbolizes the most remote part of the earth; [2 Chr 20:36f](http://www.usccb.org/nab/bible/2chronicles/2chronicles20.htm#v36) mention the ships that travel to Tarshish from the Red Sea; Jonah was familiar with Tarshish ([Jon 1:3](http://www.usccb.org/nab/bible/jonah/jonah1.htm#v3); [4:2](http://www.usccb.org/nab/bible/jonah/jonah4.htm#v2)).
6. The Kittim were descendants of Javan who settled on the southern coast of Cyprus ([Num 24:24](http://www.usccb.org/nab/bible/numbers/numbers24.htm#v24); [1 Chr 1:7](http://www.usccb.org/nab/bible/1chronicles/1chronicles1.htm#v7); [Dan 11:30](http://www.usccb.org/nab/bible/daniel/daniel11.htm#v30)), but the term Kittim may refer to all peoples across the seas including the Greeks and Romans ([1 Mac 1:1](http://www.usccb.org/nab/bible/1maccabees/1maccabees1.htm#v1)).
7. The Dananites/ Dodanim/ Rodanim were descendants of Javan who are believed to be the people of the island of Rhodes ([1 Chr 1:7](http://www.usccb.org/nab/bible/1chronicles/1chronicles1.htm#v7)).

The descendants of Tarshish, Meshech, Tubal, and Javan are mentioned among the Gentile nations who will be gathered back into the family of God in the Age of the Messiah in Isaiah's prophecy in [Is 66:18-24](http://www.usccb.org/nab/bible/isaiah/isaiah66.htm#v18).

**Ham's sons and their descendants**: (\* = a people not an individual)

|  |  |  |  |
| --- | --- | --- | --- |
| 15. Cush's sons | 16. Mizraim/Egypt's sons | 17. Put | 18. Canaan's sons |
| 19. Seba | 27. people of Lud\* |  | 34. Sidon (firstborn) |
| 20. Havilah | 28. people of Anam\* |  | 35. Heth |
| 21. Sabtah | 29. Lehab\* |  | 36. the Jebusites\* |
| 22. Raamah (fathered)        23. Sheba        24. Dedan | 30. Naphtuh\* |  | 37. the Amorites\* |
| 31. Pathros\* |  | 38. Girgashites\* |
| 32. Casluh\* |  | 39. Hivites\* |
| 25. Sabteca | 33. Caphor\* (origin of the Philistines) |  | 40. Arkites\* |
|  |  | 41. Sinites\* |
|  |  |  | 42. Arvadites\* |
| 26. Nimrod |  |  | 43. Zemarites\* |
|  |  |  | 44. Hamathites\* |

**The sons of Ham:** Ham's sons include Israel's bitterest enemies: the Egyptians, Babylonians, Assyrians, and Canaanites.  The descendants of Ham's son Put (#17) and his grandson Lud (#27) are mentioned among the Gentile nations who will be gathered back into the family of God in the Messianic Age ([Is 66:18-24](http://www.usccb.org/nab/bible/isaiah/isaiah66.htm#v18)).

1. Cush has been identified with the land bordering the Red Sea (see Midian as Cush in [Num 12:1](http://www.usccb.org/nab/bible/numbers/numbers12.htm#v1); [Hab 3:7](http://www.usccb.org/nab/bible/habakkuk/habakkuk3.htm#v7)).  In the Middle Ages the name was be mistakenly applied to Ethiopia.
2. Mizraim was the father of the Egyptians ([Ps 78:51](http://www.usccb.org/nab/bible/psalms/psalm78.htm#v51)).
3. Put's descendants settled in the area of North Africa that is modern Libya.
4. Canaan, who is identified in the birth order as Ham's youngest son, usurped the land that was Shem's inheritance in the southern Levant from southern Syria, to Phoenicia and the land that bordered length of the Jordan River to the Dead Sea'the land that bears his name.

Mizraim may be Menes, the legendary founder of Egypt; Mizraim is the Hebrew word for Egypt.  His descendants became the people of North Africa, Egypt, Crete, and the ancestors of the Philistines and the Greeks.

In another series of 7s, five sons of Cush are named ([Gen 10:7](http://www.usccb.org/nab/bible/genesis/genesis10.htm#v7)) and two sons of Cush's grandsons fathered by Raamah ([Gen 10:7](http://www.usccb.org/nab/bible/genesis/genesis10.htm#v7)).  Nimrod, a sixth son of Cush, isn't named until [10:8](http://www.usccb.org/nab/bible/genesis/genesis10.htm#v8), breaking the pattern.  Most of the sons of Cush settled in South Arabia, North Arabia, Ethiopia, and Yemen.  Nimrod stands out from among the sons of Cush.

**Genesis 10:8-10:** 8*Cush fathered Nimrod who was the first potentate on earth.* 9*He was a mighty hunter in the eyes (face) of Yahweh, hence the saying, 'Like Nimrod, a mighty hunter in the eyes (face) of Yahweh.'* 10*The mainstays of his empire were Babel, Erech and Accad, all of them in the land of Shinar.* This passage is a break in the genealogical pattern.  This is the first of several historical notes (see [10:8-12](http://www.usccb.org/nab/bible/genesis/genesis10.htm#v8), [14](http://www.usccb.org/nab/bible/genesis/genesis10.htm#v14), [19](http://www.usccb.org/nab/bible/genesis/genesis10.htm#v19), [25](http://www.usccb.org/nab/bible/genesis/genesis10.htm#v25)).  Each historical note is a reference to events that will take place in the future and concern people or nations that stand in opposition to the people of God.

Ham's eldest son Cush is the father of Nimrod/ Nimrud ([1 Chr 1:10](http://www.usccb.org/nab/bible/1chronicles/1chronicles1.htm#v10); [Mic 5:6](http://www.usccb.org/nab/bible/micah/micah5.htm#v6)).  Nimrod is identified as a man of power and authority; he is the world's first political ruler to expand his domination over other tribes to create an empire.  The passage identifying Nimrod as "a mighty hunter in the eyes of Yahweh" is literally rendered "a mighty hunter before Yahweh's face"'in our modern terminology a better sense of the character of this man is that he was mighty "in God's face"'flaunting his own power and authority in opposition to God and God's representative, Shem.  The information about Nimrod in this passage is that he established an empire and built the cities of Babel, Erech and Accad in the land of Shinar (modern Iraq), prepares the reader for the rebellion of the people in the building of the Tower of Babel ([Gen 11:1-9](http://www.usccb.org/nab/bible/genesis/genesis11.htm#v1)). Some scholars have suggested that Nimrod became deified as the Mesopotamian god Ninurta, patron god of war and hunting.

**Genesis 10:10:** 10*The mainstays of his empire were Babel, Erech and Accad [Akkad], all of them in the land of Shinar.*

The land of Shinar is all of Mesopotamia.  It was the home of Sumer, the first ancient civilization to develop writing in c. 3500 BC.  All the cities of Nimrod that are listed are cities of Sumer. Babel is Babylon, built on the Euphrates River south of where the Euphrates and Tigris Rivers flow the closest together in their journeys to the Persian Gulf.  Erech is modern Warka in southern Iraq.  The inhabitants of this area were later deported to Samaria by the Assyrians after the ten Northern tribes were sent into exile to the eastern part of the Assyrian Empire ([Ezra 4:9-10](http://www.usccb.org/nab/bible/ezra/ezra4.htm#v9)).  Accad / Akkad was the capital of the great Akkadian king Sargon I (2350-2295).  Akkad was located on the Euphrates River in northern Babylonia; the site of the legendary city has never been discovered.  Akkad is usually mentioned as a region in associate with the two great city-states of Sumer and Akkad'controlling Mesopotamia south of Assyria to the Persian Gulf.  Akkad was the capital of the 3rd millennium BC Akkadian Empire, the first world Empire and the conquerors of the Sumerians([2](http://www.agapebiblestudy.com/genesis/Lesson_7.htm" \l "end2)).

This is the first reference to the city of Babylon in Scripture.  The city will become a symbol of man's sin and corruption ([Is 21:9](http://www.usccb.org/nab/bible/isaiah/isaiah21.htm#v9); [1 Pt 5:13](http://www.usccb.org/nab/bible/1peter/1peter5.htm#v13); [Rev 14:8](http://www.usccb.org/nab/bible/revelation/revelation14.htm#v8); [18:2-3](http://www.usccb.org/nab/bible/revelation/revelation18.htm#v2); [17:5](http://www.usccb.org/nab/bible/revelation/revelation17.htm#v5)).

**Question:** Where is the last mention of Babylon found in Scripture?    
**Answer:** In [Revelation chapters 17-18](http://www.usccb.org/nab/bible/revelation/revelation17.htm).

The divine judgment on mankind in [Revelation 17:15](http://www.usccb.org/nab/bible/revelation/revelation17.htm#v15) is an eerily echo of the four designations of Japheth's, Ham's and Shem's descendants who were not within the line of the faithful remnant of the "promised seed":

|  |  |
| --- | --- |
| [**Genesis 10:5b**](http://www.usccb.org/nab/bible/genesis/genesis10.htm#v5)**,** [**20**](http://www.usccb.org/nab/bible/genesis/genesis10.htm#v20)**,** [**31**](http://www.usccb.org/nab/bible/genesis/genesis10.htm#v31) | [**Revelation 17:15**](http://www.usccb.org/nab/bible/revelation/revelation17.htm#v15) |
| *These were Japheth's sons, in their respective countries, each with its own language, by clan and nation.*  *These were Ham's sons, by clans and languages, by countries and nations.*  *These were Shem's sons, by clans and languages, by countries and nations.* | *The angel continued, 'The waters you saw, beside which the prostitute [harlot] was sitting are all the peoples, the populations, the nations and the languages.* |

**Genesis 10:11-12:** 11*From this country came Asshur, and he built Nineveh, Rehoboth-Ir, Calah,* 12*and Resen between Nineveh and Calah (this being the capital).*

The cities named in Genesis 10:11-12:

* Asshur is listed as the second son of Shem in [Genesis 10:22](http://www.usccb.org/nab/bible/genesis/genesis10.htm#v22), but Asshur is also the name of the oldest Assyrian city.  It was situated on the right bank of the Tigris River between the upper and lower Zab, north of Akkad, east of Mitanni, and close to the Zagros mountains on the east and the mountains of Armenia in northern Mesopotamia.   The name is also applied to the surrounding district and to the people of the district.  The name of the pagan god worshipped by these people was also named Asshur, probably the deified founder.
* Nineveh, situated on left bank of the Tigris, was the capital of the Assyrian Empire.  God sent the Prophet Jonah to this city to call the people to repentance in the 8th century BC.
* Calah, located 20 miles south of Nineveh, was also known in antiquity by the place-name "city of Nimrod."
* Resen is believed to be a site about 2.5 miles south of Nineveh.

In Hebrew *rehoboth-Ir* means "wide city" and instead of a separate city built by Asshur, the text may be referring to the size of Nineveh with its wide plazas and streets, which was often commented upon in ancient texts; even Jonah commented on the impressive size of the city ([Jon 1:2](http://www.usccb.org/nab/bible/jonah/jonah1.htm#v2); [3:2-3](http://www.usccb.org/nab/bible/jonah/jonah3.htm#v2)).  All of these are Assyrian cities.  This passage establishes the origins of the Semitic (descendants of Shem) people that will succeed the Akkadians and Egyptians as the regional power to become the region's most vicious conquerors.  The cruelty of the Assyrians was legendary.  The Assyrians will destroy the Northern Kingdom of Israel in the 8th century BC ([2 Kgs 17:5-6](http://www.usccb.org/nab/bible/2kings/2kings17.htm#v5)).  The "seed of the serpent" was even found in Shem's line. ([3](http://www.agapebiblestudy.com/genesis/Lesson_7.htm" \l "end3))

**Genesis 10:18-20:** 18*Arvadites, Zemarites, and Hamathites.  Later, the Canaanite clans spread out.* 19*The Canaanite frontier stretched from Sidon all the way to Gerar near Gaza, and all the way to Sodom, Gomorrah, Adamah and Zeboiim near Lesha.* 20*These were Ham's sons, by clans and languages, by countries and nations.*

Noteworthy among Canaan's sons are the Jebusites ([Gen 10:16](http://www.usccb.org/nab/bible/genesis/genesis10.htm#v16)) who were the original inhabitants of Jerusalem.  They will be conquered by Israel's King David in 1000 BC, and Jerusalem will become Israel's capital.  The statement in [10:18](http://www.usccb.org/nab/bible/genesis/genesis10.htm#v18) that the Canaanite clans will be scattered uses the same Hebrew word that will be used three more times in [11:4](http://www.usccb.org/nab/bible/genesis/genesis11.htm#v4), [8](http://www.usccb.org/nab/bible/genesis/genesis11.htm#v8) and [9](http://www.usccb.org/nab/bible/genesis/genesis11.htm#v9) (in Hebrew *puwts*), foreshadowing the judgment against the builders of the tower of Babel: *Yahweh scattered them thence all over the world* (*Brown-Driver-Briggs,* page 806-7; *The Interlinear bible: Hebrew-English # 6327,* pages 23-25).

Two sons and nine descendants of nine other sons are listed from Canaan's line.  The descendants of these people inhabited the lands of the Arabian Peninsula, and the land of Canaan from Mt Hermon in the north, to the Mediterranean costal cities of the Phoenicians extending from Sidon in the north all the way to Gaza in the south, to what would come to be called the Judean hill country and Jerusalem, to the plain south of the Dead Sea.

**Question:** What is the significance of the narrator defining the boundaries of the land of Canaan?  See [Gen 15:18](http://www.usccb.org/nab/bible/genesis/genesis15.htm#v18); [Num 34:2-12](http://www.usccb.org/nab/bible/numbers/numbers34.htm#v2).  
**Answer:** The narrator defined these borders in detail because this land will become the Promised Land that God will return to the "promised seed" from Shem's line.  The first promise of the return will be to Abram/Abraham in [Genesis 15:18](http://www.usccb.org/nab/bible/genesis/genesis15.htm#v18) and the promise will be repeated to the children of Israel ([Num 34:2-12](http://www.usccb.org/nab/bible/numbers/numbers34.htm#v2)) and their heirs ([Ez 47:15-20](http://www.usccb.org/nab/bible/ezekiel/ezekiel47.htm" \l "v15); [48:1-28](http://www.usccb.org/nab/bible/ezekiel/ezekiel48.htm#v1)).

**Genesis 10:22-23:** *Shem too fathered sons, being ancestor of all the sons of Eber and Japheth's elder brother.* Some translations read: "whose older brother was Japheth."  The wording of the Hebrew text is ambiguous and could be translated with either Shem or Japheth as the elder brother; however, the repeated references continually listing Shem first in the order of the three brothers and Noah's designation of Shem as the re'shiyt over Japheth, who was also righteous, supports the reading in the New Jerusalem translation that Shem is Japheth's elder brother.

There is another pattern break in [Genesis 10:25](http://www.usccb.org/nab/bible/genesis/genesis10.htm#v25).  Shem's descendant Eber is mentioned in [10:21](http://www.usccb.org/nab/bible/genesis/genesis10.htm#v21) and [24](http://www.usccb.org/nab/bible/genesis/genesis10.htm#v24).  The line of the promised seed will run through Arpachshad and through his grandson Eber/Heber, from whom the Hebrew people receive their name and the name of their language. Five of Shem's sons are listed and then the genealogy narrows to focus on the line of the descendants Eber/Heber through his second son Joktan.

**Genesis 10:25:** *To Eber were born two sons: the first was called Peleg, because it was in his time that the earth was divided, and his brother was called Joktan.*

There is a word play on Peleg's name.  Peleg's name means "division" in Hebrew and prophesies the scattering of the nations at Babel.  The line of the promised seed will become divided in the families of Heber's sons.  Peleg will remain faithful to God but his brother will align himself with the tower builders who are intent upon building "a name for themselves" apart from Shem's (in Hebrew = name's) authority.

**Shem is the father of all Semitic peoples.**  **Shem's sons and their descendants:**

|  |  |  |  |  |
| --- | --- | --- | --- | --- |
| 45. Elam | 46. Asshur | 47. Arpachshad's son and his descendants to the 4th generation | 48. Lud | 49. Aram's sons |
|  |  | 54. Shelah    fathered  55. Heber/Eber    fathered  56. Peleg = firstborn, and his brother 57. Joktan who    fathered  58. Almondad, 59. Sheleph, 60. Hazarmaveth, 61. Jerah, 62. Hadoram, 63. Uzal, 64. Diklah, 65.Obal, 66. Abina-El, 67. Sheba, 68. Ophir, 69. Havilah, 70. Jobab) |  | 50. Uz 51. Hul 52. Gether 53. Mash/        Mesha/        Meshech |

**Genesis 10:29-32:** 29*Ophir, Havilah, Jobab; all these were sons of Joktan.* 30*They occupied a stretch of country from Mesha all the way to Sephar, the eastern mountain range.* 31*These were Shem's sons, by clans and languages, by countries and nations.* 32*Such were the clans of Noah's descendants, listed by descent and nation.  From them, other nations branched out on earth after the flood.*

Both Japheth and Shem have sons named Mesha ([Gen 10:2](http://www.usccb.org/nab/bible/genesis/genesis10.htm#v2); [1 Chr 1:5](http://www.usccb.org/nab/bible/1chronicles/1chronicles1.htm#v5)).  The country of Mesha may refer to the mountains of Lebanon or Mt. Marius in northern Mesopotamia.  Sephar has not been identified, but Herodotus (5th century BC world traveler and historian) recorded that Cephanes was an ancient Greek word for the Persians (*The Histories, 7.61.2*).  Some of Shem's descendants will join forces with Ham's descendants to become the enemies of the "promised seed" and will face Yahweh's wrath ([Jer 25:20-32](http://www.usccb.org/nab/bible/jeremiah/jeremiah25.htm" \l "v20)).

**Question:** What blessing did the sons of Noah fulfill?  
**Answer:** The descendants of Noah fulfilled the blessing of Genesis 9:1: *God blessed Noah and his sons and said to them, 'Breed, multiply and fill the earth.'*

**Question:** What is the significance of the list of 70 nations that existed as one human family in Genesis chapter 10?  See [Gen 45:27](http://www.usccb.org/nab/bible/genesis/genesis45.htm#v27), [Lk 10:1-12](http://www.usccb.org/nab/bible/luke/luke10.htm#v1), [16-20](http://www.usccb.org/nab/bible/luke/luke10.htm#v16), and [Is 66:18-19](http://www.usccb.org/nab/bible/isaiah/isaiah66.htm#v18).  Note: in many manuscripts of Luke the number in [10:1](http://www.usccb.org/nab/bible/luke/luke10.htm#v1) and [17](http://www.usccb.org/nab/bible/luke/luke10.htm#v17) is 70.  
**Answer:** At this point in Genesis, Shem's descendants are part of the 70 nation family before the human family was disbursed in the incident at Babel.  By the end of Genesis, Shem's physical and spiritual heirs, the children of Jacob/Israel, will equal the number of the physical fathers of the 70 nations.  In the Gospel of St. Luke, Jesus began sending out His 70 [some texts read 72] disciples to become the spiritual fathers who will gather the progeny of Noah back into one human family, fulfilling the Prophet Isaiah's prophecy of restoration in [Isaiah 66:18-19](http://www.usccb.org/nab/bible/isaiah/isaiah66.htm#v18) ([Lk 10:1](http://www.usccb.org/nab/bible/luke/luke10.htm" \l "v1)).

**Please read Genesis 11:1-9: The Rebellion of the City dwellers and Their Man-Made Holy Mountain**  
**11:1*The whole world spoke the same language, with the same vocabulary [words].* 2*Now, as people moved eastwards they found a valley in the land of Shinar where they settled.* 3*They said to one another, 'Come, let us make bricks and bake them in the fire.'  For stone they used bricks, and for mortar they used bitumen.* 4*'Come,' they said, 'let us build ourselves a city and a tower with its top reaching heaven.  Let us make a name [shem] for ourselves, so that we do not get scattered all over the world.'* 5*Now Yahweh came down to see the city and the tower that the people had built.* 6*So they are all a single people with a single language!' said Yahweh.  'This is only the start of their undertakings!  Now nothing they plan to do will be beyond them.* 7*Come, let us go down and confuse their language there, so that they cannot understand one another.'* 8*Yahweh scattered them thence all over the world, and they stopped building the city.* 9*That is why it was called [shem = named] Babel, since there Yahweh confused the language of the whole world; and from there Yahweh scattered them all over the world.***

**Genesis 11:1:** 11:1*The whole world spoke the same language, with the same vocabulary [words].* Sumerian cuneiform tablets record that at one time all humanity spoke the same language (*Evidence That Demands a Verdict,* page 105).

**Question:** In what direction did the people migrate before founding a city in the valley of the land of Shinar?  What is significant about this detail?  See [Gen 3:24](http://www.usccb.org/nab/bible/genesis/genesis3.htm#v24); [4:16](http://www.usccb.org/nab/bible/genesis/genesis4.htm#v16).  
**Answer:** Since the fall of man, movement to the east has come to symbolize moving away from God.  These members of the human family are drifting farther away from a relationship with the One True God.

**Question:** What public works project do these people plan, what materials do they use and what is their reason for the project?    
**Answer:** Their plan is to build a tower, not out of stone, which had been the most common building material in the ancient world, or even sundried bricks but out of fired bricks and mortar.  Their reason for building the tower was to unify themselves as one people'to make a "name" for themselves'to glorify themselves instead of glorifying God.

The building material is identified as fired bricks that were to be held in place by bitumen.  The oldest shaped, sun-dried bricks date to 7500 BC and were discovered at Cayonu, a Neolithic settlement in the region of the upper Tigris River near the Taurus Mountains.  The invention of fired bricks constructed with bitumen is believed to have originated in the Near East and dates to the 3rd millennium BC.  It is logical that fired bricks were the choice for the region of Mesopotamia (region of modern Iraq) in which the city was built.  The Egyptians built their monuments out of stone because they had an inexhaustible supply of stone for building, but Mesopotamia did not have an abundance of stone.  The bitumen that was to serve as the mortar is a naturally occurring tar from asphalt or heavy oil residues found in surface oil seeps in ancient times.  The plan to build the temple tower with fired bricks and bitumen is consistent with the time in which this event is situated historically and the physical location of the city.

Most ancient Mesopotamian cities were dominated by a temple complex which included a tower known as a ziggurat (from the Akkadian word *ziqqurratu*). A ziggurat was a stepped tower with a square base upon which successive, smaller, square structures were built, all with sloping sides, creating a high structure that was an artificial "holy mountain."  Ziggurats were the dominant structure in temple complexes of the Sumerian, Akkadian, Assyrian, and Babylonian cultures and were built in from two or three to as many as seven stages, with the base oriented to the four points of the compass, with ramps or steps connecting the different levels, and a small temple on the summit.

The Sumerians had a story that was similar to the destruction of the Tower of Babel.  A 10 x 5 foot stone stele discovered at the site of the archaeological excavation at Ur related that King Ur-Nammu built a great ziggurat that was intended to reach to the heavens.  A cuneiform tablet, also discovered at Ur, related that the tower was destroyed by the angry gods who scattered the people across the earth and confused their speech (*Evidence That Demands a Verdict,* page 105).

But there was also a ruined legendary tower near Babylon.  The 6th century BC court archives of the Neo-Babylonian king Nabonpolassar and his son, Nebuchadnezzar II, record that these kings rebuilt the ancient ziggurat of Etemenanki (Sumerian for "temple of the foundation of heaven and earth") that had never been completed.  Greek historian Herodotus (5th century BC) was impressed by the size of this ancient temple and by the Babylonian's brick making technology.  He called the ziggurat "the Sanctuary of Zeus Belos (Bel or Baal)," referring to the chief god of the Greeks who he assumed was the same the chief deity of the Assyrian pantheon, Bel or Baal.  He wrote that the ziggurat's square base measured an impressive 2 stades, or 1,170 feet on each side. (*Histories, 1.170-181; The Course of Civilization, vol. I, page 22; A History of the Ancient Near East, pages 25, 165, 186, 260*)([4](http://www.agapebiblestudy.com/genesis/Lesson_7.htm" \l "end4)).

**Question:** Can you find a repetitive pattern in this part of the narrative built around the words and will of the people of the city ([11:1-4](http://www.usccb.org/nab/bible/genesis/genesis11.htm#v1)) versus the words and will of Yahweh ([11:5-9](http://www.usccb.org/nab/bible/genesis/genesis11.htm#v5))?  Hint: look for an alternating pattern in a list that repeats in the same order.  
**Answer:**

**Words of the People:**

A. *The whole world spoke the same language with the same vocabulary [words]* ([11:1](http://www.usccb.org/nab/bible/genesis/genesis11.htm#v1))

            B. *Come, let us make bricks...* ([11:3](http://www.usccb.org/nab/bible/genesis/genesis11.htm#v3))

                         C.  *let us build ourselves a city and a tower* ([11:4a](http://www.usccb.org/nab/bible/genesis/genesis11.htm#v4))

                                      D. *Let us make a name for ourselves* ([11:4b](http://www.usccb.org/nab/bible/genesis/genesis11.htm#v4))

                                                   E. *so that we do not get scattered all over the earth* ([11:4c](http://www.usccb.org/nab/bible/genesis/genesis11.htm#v4))

**Words of Yahweh:**

A. *So they are all a single people with a single language* (11:6)

             B. *Come, let us go down* ([11:7](http://www.usccb.org/nab/bible/genesis/genesis11.htm#v7))

                          C. *and they stopped building the city* ([11:8](http://www.usccb.org/nab/bible/genesis/genesis11.htm#v8))

                                       D. *it was called* [literally *named*] *Babel* ([11:9a](http://www.usccb.org/nab/bible/genesis/genesis11.htm#v9))

                                                    E. *Yahweh scattered them all over the world* ([11:9b](http://www.usccb.org/nab/bible/genesis/genesis11.htm#v9))

It is not an accident that the narrative of the city and its tower (it is never referred to as the "tower of Babel" in Scripture) comes sandwiched between the two lines that trace their ancestry back to Shem.

**Question:** What are the two lines and where does the division occur?  See [Genesis 10:22-29](http://www.usccb.org/nab/bible/genesis/genesis10.htm#v22) and [11:10-25](http://www.usccb.org/nab/bible/genesis/genesis11.htm#v10); the key verse is [Genesis 10:25](http://www.usccb.org/nab/bible/genesis/genesis10.htm#v25).  What does the division symbolize?  
**Answer:** The line of Shem before the Tower of Babel narrative traces Shem's descendants through Eber (Heber), his son Joktan, and Joktan's 13 descendants, while Shem's line after Babel traces the line of the "promised seed" through Eber (Heber), his firstborn son Peleg and 5 generations of Peleg's descendants climaxing in Terah's sons Abram, Nahor, and Haran.   The division occurs between the sons of Eber (Heber), Peleg and Joktan, which symbolizes the division in the human family.

**Genesis 11:9:** 9*That is why it was called [shem = named] Babel, since there Yahweh confused the language of the whole world; and from there Yahweh scattered them all over the world.*

The etymology of the word *babel* is explained in 11:9 by the Hebrew root *bll,* which means "to confuse," but the literal meaning of *bab-el* in Hebrew is "god's gate" or "gate of god" (*New Jerusalem,* note "d," page 29; *Brown-Driver-Biggs,* page 93).  Such temple towers'man-made "holy mountains," were meant to grant the gods a gateway to earth.  Ironically, this was the result'God came down, but He was not pleased!

**Genesis 9:7:** *Come, let us go down and confuse their language there, so that they cannot understand one another.'*

St. Augustine considered that the reference to "us" suggested the Trinity: *It is conceivable that here there may have been an allusion to the Trinity, if we suppose that the Father said to the Son and the Holy Spirit, "Come, let us descend and confound their tongue."  The supposition is sound.  But if so, we must rule out the possibility that angels were meant. And surely it is more proper for the angles to come to God unbidden, moved by grace, that is, by the thoughts that make them devoutly submissive to unchanging truth...* (St. Augustine, *City of God 16.6*).

**Question:** What action did God take and why?  What is ironic about what the people desired, what they feared, and what happened to them?  
**Answer:** The gift of language was a blessing from God given only to mankind.  In the past when man abused a blessing, the punishment fit the crime.  In Adam and Eve's case they were exiled from the garden, man was to toil for his food, and woman was to be dominated by her husband.  In this case, the gift of a common language was used to ferment rebellion.  God scattered the tower builders across the face of the earth, confusing their languages.  Ironically, they planned to build the tower as a "sign" of their unity and power, but the confusion of tongues became a "sign" of the disunity of the human family.  They had been unified as one people before their rebellion, but their desire to become a unified political power dominating their brothers in the human family resulted in exactly what they had feared'disunity and estrangement.

**Question:** What is the Hebrew word for "name" and how were the people unified previously?  
**Answer:** The Hebrew word for "name" is *shem.*  They were unified under God's man, *Shem,* the righteous son of Noah who received Noah's blessing as God's covenant mediator: *Blessed be Yahweh, God of Shem* ([Gen 9:26](http://www.usccb.org/nab/bible/genesis/genesis9.htm#v26)), and whose authority was to be honored by the his brothers, Japheth and Ham ([9:26](http://www.usccb.org/nab/bible/genesis/genesis9.htm#v26)).

**Question:** What is the significant connection between the powerful but wicked men who ruled before the flood and who made a "name" for themselves in [Genesis 6:4](http://www.usccb.org/nab/bible/genesis/genesis6.htm#v4) (literal translation is: *These were the heroes of days gone by, men of name*) and the men who built the tower?   
**Answer:** Like the corrupt men before the flood event, the men of Shinar wanted to form their own political power base, making their own "name" apart from the guidance of the man named as God's representative'Shem (Hebrew = name)  son of Noah.

In Shem's toledot, Scripture noted that for the first time the human family became divided during the lifetime of Eber's (Heber's) sons Peleg and Joktan'identifying the point in salvation history when the rupture in the human family occurred in God's judgment against the rebellion of the tower builders.

**Question:** When would God heal that rupture and restore humanity, once again calling man into one family?  
**Answer:** The family of man would be restored in the birth of the New Covenant, universal (*katholikos* in Greek; *catholicus* in Latin) Church of Jesus Christ in 30 AD during the Jewish Feast of Pentecost, which commemorated God coming down on Mt. Sinai in fire to take Israel as His holy nation.  It was on the day of that feast in 30AD that God the Holy Spirit came down in fire, filling and indwelling the New Covenant people of God who were praying in the Upper Room in Jerusalem ([Acts 2:1-12](http://www.usccb.org/nab/bible/acts/acts2.htm#v1)).  On that day, God the Holy Spirit reversed the curse of Babel and called all mankind back into one universal family in Christ.

**Question:** Read [Acts 2:1-12](http://www.usccb.org/nab/bible/acts/acts2.htm#v1).  Compare and contrast the events of the tower and the division of the human family with the events at Pentecost, 30 AD.

**Answer:**

THE TOWER OF BABEL and THE SECOND PENTECOST 30AD

|  |  |
| --- | --- |
| **The Scattering of the People in** [**Genesis 11**](http://www.usccb.org/nab/bible/genesis/genesis11.htm) | **The Unity of the People in the Second Great Pentecost in** [**Acts 2**](http://www.usccb.org/nab/bible/acts/acts2.htm) |
| 1. Confusion of tongues; end of one universal language ([Genesis 11:9](http://www.usccb.org/nab/bible/genesis/genesis11.htm#v9)) | 1. Reversal of Babel: tongues are understood = universal language of the Gospel of salvation ([Acts 2:5-10](http://www.usccb.org/nab/bible/acts/acts2.htm#v5)) |
| 2. In judgment, God scattered the people to the four corners of the earth, bringing to an end one universal family ([Genesis 11:8](http://www.usccb.org/nab/bible/genesis/genesis11.htm#v8)) | 2. People will spread the Gospel of Jesus Christ, uniting humanity into the New Covenant family the harvest of souls from every corner of the earth ([Acts 1:8](http://www.usccb.org/nab/bible/acts/acts1.htm#v8)) |
| 3. Language was used to promote a human agenda: "Let's make a name for ourselves..." ([Genesis 11:4](http://www.usccb.org/nab/bible/genesis/genesis11.htm#v4)).  The confusion of tongues is a "sign" of the disunity of the human family. | 3. Language is used as a "sign" to announce the mighty works of God ([Acts 1:6](http://www.usccb.org/nab/bible/acts/acts1.htm#v6)).  It is the language of the Gospel of salvation that will be used to reverse the disunity of Babel. |
| 4. Results in disunity ([Genesis 11:8-9](http://www.usccb.org/nab/bible/genesis/genesis11.htm#v8)) | 4. Results in unity in the Body of Christ ([1 Corinthians 12:12-27](http://www.usccb.org/nab/bible/1corinthians/1corinthians12.htm#v12); [Galatians 2:28](http://www.usccb.org/nab/bible/galatians/galatians2.htm#v28)) |
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Note: the first Pentecost was Israel's rendezvous with Yahweh at Mt. Sinai in [Exodus 19'20](http://www.usccb.org/nab/bible/exodus/exodus19.htm), fifty days after crossing the Red Sea (Sea of Reeds).

God did not forget the people who were lost to His covenantal union.  The Feast of Tabernacles, also called the Feast of Shelters (Sukkot in Hebrew), was the last annual remembrance feast of the liturgical calendar of the Sinai Covenant, held in the 7th month from the 15th to the 22st.  For the first 7 days of the feast, the people of God sacrificed 70 bulls for the conversion of the 70 nations of the ruptured family of humanity.  The feast ended during a sacred assembly on the 8th day ([Lev 23:33-43](http://www.usccb.org/nab/bible/leviticus/leviticus23.htm#v33); [Num 29:12-38](http://www.usccb.org/nab/bible/numbers/numbers29.htm#v12)).  The Temple of Solomon and its successor, the Second Temple, was built with a court for the Gentile nations of the earth, in which foreign peoples could come and receive teaching about the One True God ([1 Kng 7:8-12](http://www.usccb.org/nab/bible/1kings/1kings7.htm#v8)).  It was the abuse of this space for the instruction of the Gentiles that angered Jesus when He drove the moneylenders out of the Temple precincts ([Jn 2:13-17](http://www.usccb.org/nab/bible/john/john2.htm" \l "v13); [Mt 21:12-13](http://www.usccb.org/nab/bible/matthew/matthew21.htm#v12); [Mk 11:15-17](http://www.usccb.org/nab/bible/mark/mark11.htm#v15)).

**Please read Genesis 11:10-26: The Descendants of Shem'The Continuation of the Line of the Promised Seed**  
**11:10*These are Shem's descendants:  When Shem was a hundred years old he fathered Arpachshad, two years after the flood.* 11*After the birth of Arpachshad, Shem lived five hundred years and fathered sons and daughters.* 12*When Arpachshad was thirty-five years old he fathered Shelah.* 13*After the birth of Shelah, Arpachshad lived four hundred and three years and fathered sons and daughters.* 14*When Shelah was thirty years old he fathered Eber.* 15*After the birth of Eber, Shelah lived four hundred and three years and fathered sons and daughters.* 16*When Eber was thirty-four years old her fathered Peleg.* 17*After the birth of Peleg, Eber lived four hundred and thirty years and fathered sons and daughters.* 18*When Peleg was thirty years old he fathered Reu.* 19*After the birth of Reu, Peleg lived two hundred and nine years and fathered sons and daughters.* 20*When Reu was thirty-two years old he fathered Serug.* 21*After the birth of Serug, Reu lived two hundred and seven years and fathered sons and daughters.* 22*When Serug was thirty years old he fathered Nahor.* 23*After the birth of Nahor, Serug lived two hundred years and fathered sons and daughters.* 24*When Nahor was twenty-nine years old he fathered Terah.* 25*After the birth of Terah, Nahor lived a hundred and nineteen years and fathered sons and daughters.* 26*When Terah was seventy years old he fathered Abram, Nahor and Haran.***

**Question:** What is the repeated pattern in this genealogical list that was missing in the 70 nation list but was present in an earlier list?  How is this list similar to that earlier genealogical list and how is it different?  
**Answer:** It is similar to the list of Seth's line of the "promised seed" in [chapter 5](http://www.usccb.org/nab/bible/genesis/genesis5.htm):

* name of father
* age when the named son was born
* length of life after the birth of the named son
* the notation that other sons and daughters were fathered.

The missing part of the previous pattern is the final statement that the patriarch died and his age at death (see [Gen 5:6-8](http://www.usccb.org/nab/bible/genesis/genesis5.htm#v6)).  Like the pattern of the genealogy in chapter 5 where the information about Noah breaks the pattern, in this genealogy Terah breaks the pattern with no mention of the births of other daughters and sons or the age when he died.

In [Genesis 11:10-26](http://www.usccb.org/nab/bible/genesis/genesis11.htm#v10) the line of Shem through Peleg is presented in 10 generations and 12 names, climaxing in Abram/Abraham.  In the chart, the age of the patriarch at death was calculated by adding the patriarch's age when the son was born plus the number of years he lived afterwards.

|  |  |  |  |
| --- | --- | --- | --- |
| **Generations** | **Age of father when son was born** | **Son** | **Age the father at death** |
| 1.   Shem | 100 | Arpachshad | 600 |
| 2.   Arpachshad | 403 | Shelah | 438 |
| 3.   Shelah | 30 | Eber | 433 |
| 4.   Eber | 34 | Peleg | 464 |
| 5.   Peleg | 30 | Rue | 239 |
| 6.   Reu | 32 | Serug | 239 |
| 7.   Serug | 30 | Nahor | 230 |
| 8.   Nahor | 29 | Terah | 148 |
| 9.   Terah | 70 | Abram, Nahor, Haran | 145/205\* |
| 10. Abram/ Abraham, Nahor, and Haran |  |  |  |
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\* Some scholars suggest the record of Terah's age in the original text may have been 145 instead of the 205 years recorded in the Masoretic text.  The Samaritan Pentateuch records 145 years (Waltke, *Genesis,* page 201).  If Terah lived 145 years that means that Abram didn't leave Haran until after his father died.

The genealogical list of Shem ending with Terah in [11:26](http://www.usccb.org/nab/bible/genesis/genesis11.htm#v26) is a repeat of the pattern break in Seth's genealogy ending with Noah; an incomplete ending without noting the length of Terah's life:

* *When Noah was five hundred years old he fathered Shem, Ham, and Japheth* ([Gen 5:32](http://www.usccb.org/nab/bible/genesis/genesis5.htm#v32)).
* *When Terah was seventy years old he fathered Abram, Nahor and Haran* ([Gen 11:26](http://www.usccb.org/nab/bible/genesis/genesis11.htm#v26)).

The years of Terah's life, like those of Noah, are recorded separately from the main list:

* *In all, Noah's life lasted nine hundred and fifty years; then he died* ([Gen 9:29](http://www.usccb.org/nab/bible/genesis/genesis9.htm#v29)).
* *Terah's life lasted two hundred and five years; then he died at Haran* ([Gen 11:32](http://www.usccb.org/nab/bible/genesis/genesis11.htm#v32)).

**Please read Genesis 11:27-31: Terah and His Descendants**  
**11:27*These are Terah's descendants [toledot]:* 28*Terah fathered Abram, Nahor and Haran.  Haran fathered Lot.  Haran died in the presence of his father Terah in his native land of Ur of the Chaldeans.* 29*Abram and Nahor married: Abram's wife was called Sarai, Nahor's wife was called Milcha daughter of Haran, father of Milcha and Iscah.* 30*Sarai was barren, having no child.* 31*Terah took his son Abram, his grandson Lot son of Haran, and his daughter-in-law, the wife of Abram, and made them leave Ur of the Chaldaeans to go to the land of Canaan.  But on arrival in Haran they settled there.* 32*Terah's life lasted two hundred and five years; then he died at Haran.***

In the continuation of the line of the "promised seed" through Terah, seven names are listed: Abram, Nahor, Haran, Lot, Milcha, Iscah, and Abram's wife Sarai.

**The descendants of Terah in Genesis 11:27-29: \*** = Milcha wife of Nahor and daughter of Haran; m = married

|  |  |  |
| --- | --- | --- |
| Abram/Abraham m. Sarai/Sarah | Nahor m. Milcha\* | Haran m.? |
|  |  | Lot (son) |
|  |  | Milcha \*(daughter) |
|  |  | Iscah (daughter) |

The original home of this family was the great city Mesopotamian city of Ur, a center of wealth, learning, and culture located on the ancient coast line of the Persian Gulf in lower Mesopotamia (see the [map of Abraham's journeys](http://www.agapebiblestudy.com/maps/AbrahamJourney/AbrahamJourney.htm)).  Ur can be equated to the New York City of the ancient world.  The addition of the word "Chaldaeans" is probably a scribal addition added centuries later to distinguish Abraham's Ur from the several other Mesopotamian and Syrian cities that bore the same name (the Chaldaeans did not move into southern Mesopotamia until many centuries after Abraham died).  [Nehemiah 9:7](http://www.usccb.org/nab/bible/nehemiah/nehemiah9.htm#v7) and [Acts 7:2-4](http://www.usccb.org/nab/bible/acts/acts7.htm#v2) also place Terah's family in Ur of the Chaldees.  In 2004 BC the Elamites (see [Gen 10:22](http://www.usccb.org/nab/bible/genesis/genesis10.htm#v22)) attacked Ur, burned the great city to the ground, and carried King Ibbi-Sin and others away into captivity.  It is likely that Terah's migration from Ur occurred just before or after this invasion and could have been the motivation for Abraham's father to leave the sanctuary of the city. It was Abram who was called by God out of Ur, not Terah.

Terah's family:

1. Haran: father of Lot and his sisters Milcha and Iscah.  He died before the family left Ur.
2. Lot: Haran's son who accompanied his uncle Abram to Canaan ([Gen 12:4](http://www.usccb.org/nab/bible/genesis/genesis12.htm#v4)).
3. Milcha: married her uncle Nahor.  The law did not forbid such inter-family marriages at this time.  Her name is a variant of the Hebrew word *malka*, which means "queen."  However, her name may be related to the name of the goddess daughter of the moon god of Ur, in the Akkadian language, the common language of this period: *Malkatu.*
4. Iscah: not mentioned again in Scripture.
5. Nahor: brother of Abram who married his niece Milcha and later fathered eight sons including Bethuel, father of Laban and Rebekah ([Gen 22:20-23](http://www.usccb.org/nab/bible/genesis/genesis22.htm#v20); [24:15-24](http://www.usccb.org/nab/bible/genesis/genesis24.htm#v15), [29](http://www.usccb.org/nab/bible/genesis/genesis24.htm#v29)).
6. Abram: Through whom the line of the "promised seed" continues.
7. Sarai: The wife of Abram.  In Hebrew her name means "princess," but if her name is based on the Akkadian language it means "queen" and is the name of the female goddess *Sharratu,* consort of Ur's chief deity, the moon-god Nanna (Sin)*.* According to Abram's testimony in [Genesis 20:12](http://www.usccb.org/nab/bible/genesis/genesis20.htm#v12), Sarai was a daughter of Terah by a different wife.

According to the archaeological record, by 3000 BC the people of Mesopotamia worshipped some four thousand deities (*Archaeology of the Old Testament,* page 66-67).  Ur was the ancient world's religious center for worship of the moon god, Nanna (also called Sin by Abraham's time).  The biblical text never suggests that Terah shared his son's faith in Yahweh.  Terah's name may be related to the Hebrew word for moon (*yerah*).  Terah left the center of moon-god worship in Ur to settle in Haran, another important center of the cult of the moon-god.  Haran, located on the bank of the Balikh River 550 miles N.W. of Ur near the modern boarder between Turkey and Syria, was on the main trade route between Nineveh and the commercial cities of northern Syria.  Not only was Haran (not the same as the name of Terah's son) a center of the moon-god cult, but the names of Terah's daughter and granddaughter may be connected to goddesses who were the wife and daughter of the moon god (Waltke, *Genesis,* pages 199-200).  That the family of Abraham worshipped other gods is supported by Jacob's insistence that his wives and other members of his family give him all their idols to bury ([Gen 35:2-4](http://www.usccb.org/nab/bible/genesis/genesis35.htm#v2)) and Joshua's warning to the Israelites not to return to their ancestor's false gods ([Josh 24:14](http://www.usccb.org/nab/bible/genesis/genesis24.htm#v14)).

**Question:** What is the significance of mentioning Sarai's bareness in [Genesis 11:30](http://www.usccb.org/nab/bible/genesis/genesis11.htm#v30)?  
**Answer:** Sarai's inability to bear Abram a son and God's promise to Abram that he will have many descendants will become the focus of the narrative of Abram/Abraham.

It is important to note the ages of the pre and post-flood patriarchs, the periods in which their lives overlapped and the age of Shem in relationship to both his ancestors and his descendants:

**Shem's Age from Arpachshad to Abraham**

|  |  |
| --- | --- |
| **Shem's age** | **Descendants** |
| 100 years | Birth of Arpachshad |
| 135 years | Birth of Shelah |
| 165 years | Birth of Eber |
| 199 years | Birth of Peleg |
| 229 years | Birth of Reu |
| 261 years | Birth of Serug |
| 291 years | Birth of Nahor |
| 320 years | Birth of Terah |
| 390 years | Birth of Abraham |
| 490 years | Birth of Isaac |
| 565 years old | Death of Abraham |
| **600 years old** | **Death of Shem** |
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According to the ages of the Patriarchs given in Scripture:

1. Adam's life overlapped Methuselah's life by 243 years.
2. Methuselah's life overlapped Noah's life by 600 years.
3. Methuselah's live overlapped Shem's life by 98 years.
4. Noah was born 126 years after Adam's death.
5. Noah lived to the ninth generation of his descendants.
6. Noah lived 350 years after the flood and died two years before Abraham's birth.
7. All the post-flood patriarchs were alive when Abraham was born except Peleg and Nahor.
8. Shem lived 98 years before the flood and 502 years after the flood.
9. Shem was alive for the births of Isaac, Esau, and Jacob.
10. **Shem outlived Abraham.**([5](http://www.agapebiblestudy.com/genesis/Lesson_7.htm" \l "end5))

**Please read Genesis 12:1-9: The Call of Abram**  
**12:1*Yahweh said to Abram, 'Leave your country, your kindred and your father's house for a country which I shall show you;* 2*and I shall make you a great nation, I shall bless you and make your name famous, you are to be a blessing!* 3*I shall bless those who bless you, and shall curse those who curse you, and all clans on earth will bless themselves by you.* 4*So Abram went as Yahweh told him, and Lot went with him.  Abram was seventy-five years old when he left Haran.* 5*Abram took his wife Sarai, his nephew Lot, all the possessions they had amassed and the people they had acquired in Haran.  They set off for the land of Canaan, and arrived there.* 6*Abram passed through the country as far as the holy place at Shechem, the Oak of Moreh.  The Canaanites were in the country at the time.* 7*Yahweh appeared to Abram and said, 'I shall give this country to your progeny [seed].'  And there, Abram built an altar to Yahweh who had appeared to him.* 8*From there he moved on to the mountainous district east of Bethel, where he pitched his tent, with Bethel to the west and Ai to the east.  There he built an altar to Yahweh and invoked the name of Yahweh.* 9*Then Abram made his way stage by stage to the Negeb.***

So begins the great saga of Abraham and his unique and sometimes turbulent relationship with the god he and his descendants came to know as El Shaddai ([Gen 17:1](http://www.usccb.org/nab/bible/genesis/genesis17.htm#v1); [28:3](http://www.usccb.org/nab/bible/genesis/genesis28.htm#v3); [35:11](http://www.usccb.org/nab/bible/genesis/genesis35.htm#v11); [43:14](http://www.usccb.org/nab/bible/genesis/genesis43.htm#v14); [48:3](http://www.usccb.org/nab/bible/genesis/genesis48.htm#v3); [49:5](http://www.usccb.org/nab/bible/genesis/genesis49.htm#v5); [Ex 6:3](http://www.usccb.org/nab/bible/exodus/exodus6.htm#v3)).  God's call to Abram and his promise: 12:1*Yahweh said to Abram, 'Leave your country, your kindred and your father's house for a country which I shall show you;* 2*and I shall make you a great nation, I shall bless you and make your name famous, you are to be a blessing!* sounds wonderful on this side of salvation history, but in the times in which Abram lived, to set out for an unknown land without the protection of one's extended family was a test of faith which we cannot appreciate.

**Question:** What is the significance of God's promise that He will make Abram's name/*shem* famous?  
**Answer:** Unlike the builders of the city and the tower who sought to make their own "name" famous, God is promising Abram a living history through his descendants who will carry and remember his name.

**Question:** Summarize the three promises God made to Abram/Abraham in Genesis 12:1-3.  What will be the result of these promises?  
**Answer:**

1. land/ a nation
2. descendants
3. a world-wide blessing

This three-fold promise will result in a three-fold covenant formation between God and Abram.

Within the 3 promises there are 7 elements of blessing associated with Abram's call, applying the symbolic number of completeness to Abram:

1. *I shall make you a great nation,*
2. *I shall bless you*
3. *I shall make your name famous,*
4. *You are to be a blessing!*
5. *I shall bless those who bless you,*
6. *I shall curse those who curse you,*
7. *All clans on earth will bless themselves by you.*

God was returning to His original plan which was to bless all humanity ([Gen 1:28](http://www.usccb.org/nab/bible/genesis/genesis1.htm#v28); repeated in [9:1](http://www.usccb.org/nab/bible/genesis/genesis9.htm#v1)).  Abram, like Noah becomes a new Adam and the father of a new humanity (CCC [59](http://www.scborromeo.org/ccc/p1s1c2a1.htm#59), [762](http://www.scborromeo.org/ccc/p123a9p1.htm#762)).

**Question:** What is remarkable about Abram's response to God's three-fold promise?  See CCC [145-46](http://www.scborromeo.org/ccc/p1s1c3a1.htm#145).  
**Answer:** Without asking for any proof of God's good intensions, or any summary of the plan to fulfill the promises, Abram stepped out in the obedience of faith to receive what God promised him.

In Genesis 12:6-9 five place-names of sites Abram visited in the land of Canaan are mentioned.

**Question:** How will these place names become important in the continuing narrative of Abram/Abraham and his descendants?  Consult a Bible dictionary and see [Gen 23:1-2](http://www.usccb.org/nab/bible/genesis/genesis23.htm#v1), [19-20](http://www.usccb.org/nab/bible/genesis/genesis23.htm#v19); [25:62-67](http://www.usccb.org/nab/bible/genesis/genesis25.htm#v62); [28:10-19](http://www.usccb.org/nab/bible/genesis/genesis28.htm#v10); [33:18-20](http://www.usccb.org/nab/bible/genesis/genesis33.htm#v18); [35:1-6](http://www.usccb.org/nab/bible/genesis/genesis35.htm#v1), [11-15](http://www.usccb.org/nab/bible/genesis/genesis35.htm#v11), [27](http://www.usccb.org/nab/bible/genesis/genesis35.htm#v27); [Josh 8:30-31](http://www.usccb.org/nab/bible/joshua/joshua8.htm#v30); [10:40-43](http://www.usccb.org/nab/bible/joshua/joshua10.htm#v40); [24:25-28](http://www.usccb.org/nab/bible/joshua/joshua24.htm#v25).   
**Answer:**

1. Shechem: Abraham's grandson Jacob settled at Shechem after his return from Mesopotamia where he built an altar to Yahweh and purchased land ([Gen 33:18-20](http://www.usccb.org/nab/bible/genesis/genesis33.htm#v18)).  During the conquest of Canaan, Joshua built and altar and made communion sacrifices to Yahweh on Mt. Ebal, near Shechem ([Josh 7:2](http://www.usccb.org/nab/bible/joshua/joshua7.htm#v2); [8:9](http://www.usccb.org/nab/bible/joshua/joshua8.htm#v9), [12](http://www.usccb.org/nab/bible/joshua/joshua8.htm#v12), [17](http://www.usccb.org/nab/bible/joshua/joshua8.htm#v17); [30-31](http://www.usccb.org/nab/bible/joshua/joshua8.htm#v30); [12:9](http://www.usccb.org/nab/bible/joshua/joshua12.htm#v9), [16](http://www.usccb.org/nab/bible/joshua/joshua12.htm#v16); [16:1-2](http://www.usccb.org/nab/bible/joshua/joshua16.htm#v1); [18:13-22](http://www.usccb.org/nab/bible/joshua/joshua18.htm#v13)).
2. The Oak of Moreh at Shechem: Jacob consecrated his family to Yahweh and buried their idols under the oak tree at Shechem ([Gen 35:2-4](http://www.usccb.org/nab/bible/genesis/genesis35.htm#v2)).  Joshua set up a stone pillar under the oak tree at Shechem as a witness to the Israelites' faithfulness to God ([Josh 24:25-28](http://www.usccb.org/nab/bible/joshua/joshua24.htm#v25)).
3. Bethel: Only Jerusalem is mentioned more often in Scripture than Bethel. It is believed to be a site about 10 miles north of Jerusalem.  It was formerly named Luz until Jacob had an encounter with Yahweh at this site ([Gen 28:10-18](http://www.usccb.org/nab/bible/genesis/genesis28.htm#v10)).  He set up a stone pillar to commemorate the event and re-named the site "beth-el," "place of god" ([Gen 28:18-19](http://www.usccb.org/nab/bible/genesis/genesis28.htm#v18)).  God commanded Jacob to settle at Bethel where he built an altar to God ([Gen 35:1](http://www.usccb.org/nab/bible/genesis/genesis35.htm#v1), [3](http://www.usccb.org/nab/bible/genesis/genesis35.htm#v3), [6](http://www.usccb.org/nab/bible/genesis/genesis35.htm#v6)).  At Bethel God repeated to Jacob the promises He made to Abraham ([Gen 35:11-15](http://www.usccb.org/nab/bible/genesis/genesis35.htm#v11)).
4. Ai: A city near Bethel.  It was the second city to be taken by Joshua in the conquest of Canaan.  Both Bethel and Ai were sites of Joshua's battles ([Josh 7:2](http://www.usccb.org/nab/bible/joshua/joshua7.htm#v2); [8:9](http://www.usccb.org/nab/bible/joshua/joshua8.htm#v9), [12](http://www.usccb.org/nab/bible/joshua/joshua8.htm#v12), [17](http://www.usccb.org/nab/bible/joshua/joshua8.htm#v17); [12:9](http://www.usccb.org/nab/bible/joshua/joshua12.htm#v9), [16](http://www.usccb.org/nab/bible/joshua/joshua12.htm#v16); [16:1-2](http://www.usccb.org/nab/bible/joshua/joshua16.htm#v1); [18:13-22](http://www.usccb.org/nab/bible/joshua/joshua18.htm#v13)).
5. The Negeb (Negev): *negeb* means "south" in Hebrew and this is probably the meaning in [Genesis 12:9](http://www.usccb.org/nab/bible/genesis/genesis12.htm#v9), that Abram moved to the south from Bethel.  Abram's destination in the move to the south was probably to the area near Hebron.   Years later, Abraham purchased a field and buried Sarah at Hebron ([Gen 23:1-2](http://www.usccb.org/nab/bible/genesis/genesis23.htm#v1), [19-20](http://www.usccb.org/nab/bible/genesis/genesis23.htm#v19)). Abraham's son Isaac was living in the *negeb* when he first saw his bride, Rebekah ([Gen 25:62-67](http://www.usccb.org/nab/bible/genesis/genesis25.htm#v62)). Isaac's son Jacob traveled south (*negeb*) and settled at Hebron ([Gen 35:27](http://www.usccb.org/nab/bible/genesis/genesis35.htm#v27)). But the *Negeb* is also name given to the region that begins in the territory of Beersheba and extends to the Gulf of Aqaba.  In the conquest of Canaan the *Negeb* was the last section of Canaan conquered by Joshua ([Josh 10:40-43](http://www.usccb.org/nab/bible/joshua/joshua10.htm#v40)).

**Question:** Abram traveled south from today's border between Turkey and Syria to Canaan.  After he arrived, how many journeys did he make within Canaan?  See [Genesis 12:6-9](http://www.usccb.org/nab/bible/genesis/genesis12.htm#v6).  
**Answer:** He made three journeys through the land:

1. In the first journey Abram traveled to Shechem and built an altar to Yahweh, sanctifying the land God promised him in a peaceful, spiritual conquest ([Gen 12:6](http://www.usccb.org/nab/bible/genesis/genesis12.htm#v6)).
2. In the second journey, he came to the east of Bethel, with Bethel on the west and Ai on the east ([Gen 12:8a](http://www.usccb.org/nab/bible/genesis/genesis12.htm#v8)).  He built a second altar and offered worship to Yahweh ([Gen 12:8b](http://www.usccb.org/nab/bible/genesis/genesis12.htm#v8)).
3. In the third journey he traveled south (*negeb*) from Bethel ([Gen 12:9](http://www.usccb.org/nab/bible/genesis/genesis12.htm#v9)).  The city of Hebron is located south of Bethel.  Hebron will become important as the narrative continues.  It will be at Hebron that Abraham will purchase a field and a burial cave for Sarai/Sarah ([Gen 23:1-2](http://www.usccb.org/nab/bible/genesis/genesis23.htm#v1), [19-20](http://www.usccb.org/nab/bible/genesis/genesis23.htm#v19)).

Abraham's grandson Jacob (who God re-named *Israel* in [Gen 32:28](http://www.usccb.org/nab/bible/genesis/genesis32.htm#v28)) traveled a similar route after returning to Canaan from Haran:

1. First Jacob went to Shechem, built an altar and purchased land ([Gen 33:18-20](http://www.usccb.org/nab/bible/genesis/genesis33.htm#v18)).  He consecrated his family to the worship of Yahweh by collecting their images of false gods and burying them under the oak tree there ([Gen 35:4](http://www.usccb.org/nab/bible/genesis/genesis35.htm#v4)).
2. Next, Jacob journeyed to Bethel and set up a standing stone to the glory of Yahweh and built an altar ([35:14-15](http://www.usccb.org/nab/bible/genesis/genesis35.htm#v14)).
3. Finally, Jacob traveled south and came to Hebron where he settled ([Gen 35:27](http://www.usccb.org/nab/bible/genesis/genesis35.htm#v27)).

The journeys of Abraham and Jacob in claiming the land of promise will be the same routes that will be re-traced by Joshua and the armies of the children of Israel in the military conquest of Canaan.  Joshua built an altar to Yahweh at Mt. Ebal which is near Shechem ([Josh 8:30](http://www.usccb.org/nab/bible/joshua/joshua8.htm#v30)), and the *Negeb* was the last section of Canaan conquered by Joshua and the Israelite army ([Josh 10:40-43](http://www.usccb.org/nab/bible/joshua/joshua10.htm#v40)).In effect, Abraham claimed the land centuries before his descendants' spiritual and military conquests of the Promised Land.  *This is to show that the conquest of the land had already been accomplished in a symbolic way in the times of the fathers, demonstrating by means of their building their altars and purchasing property.  Thus, it shows in the deeds of the fathers there is a source of trust that the Lord has cared for them from the very start and that he will remain trustworthy in the day of the descendants of the fathers later on* (*Encyclopedia Biblica,* Bialik Institute, 1955-56, 1:66).

**Question for group discussion:**

Shem was identified as God's man ([Gen 9:26-27](http://www.usccb.org/nab/bible/genesis/genesis9.htm#v26)) and the man who became the covenant mediator after Noah.  In fact, down through salvation history God always appointed one man to be His representative to His people. Do we have a man to whom we can look to today to guide the people of God as the Lord's earthly representative?  How are his covenant obligations similar to Shem's, to Moses' and to the High Priests of the Sinai Covenant?  How are they different?

**Endnotes:**

[1](http://www.agapebiblestudy.com/genesis/Lesson_7.htm" \l "note1). Herodotus, the 5th century BC Greek historian and world traveler, recorded during his stay in Egypt that a girl who was a still a virgin could not be found in the entire nation.  This statement suggests that there was widespread sexual abuse of children.

[2](http://www.agapebiblestudy.com/genesis/Lesson_7.htm" \l "note2). Sumer was the earliest known civilization to produce written records.  The earliest Sumerian sites to yield written documents, thus far discovered, date to c. 3250 BC.  Sumerian cities explored by archaeologists include: Uruk (biblical Erech). Lagash, Nippur, Shuruppak, Ur, Eridu, Kish, Eshnuua, and other cities of less influence and importance.  The excavations of these Sumerian cities have produced tens of thousands of Sumerian cuneiform tablets.  The Akkadians conquered the region controlled by Sumer circa 2350 BC and ruled Mesopotamia from their capital at Akkad.  The ancient city of Calah, also called Nimrud, is located about 20 miles south of Nineveh.  The famous "Black Obelisk" was discovered at Calah/Nimrud.  This artifact records the tribute Israelite King Jehu son of Omri paid to the Assyrian king (*Archaeology and the Old Testament,* Alfred Hoerth, Baker Academic, Grand Rapids, Michigan, 1998, page 322).

[3](http://www.agapebiblestudy.com/genesis/Lesson_7.htm" \l "note3). The art of the ancient Assyrians presents a distinctive Semitic appearance of the Assyrian people who are depicted with characteristic large, hooked noses, heavy upper lips, and thick curly hair and beards. The appearance of Assyrians differs significantly from the faces of individuals in Sumerian art and also from those individuals depicted in Babylonian art (*Dictionary of the Bible,* page 63).   According to the tablet of nations in Genesis 10, the Sumerians and Babylonians were descendants of Ham while Asshur, the father of the Assyrians, was a descendant of Shem, progenitor of all Semites.

[4](http://www.agapebiblestudy.com/genesis/Lesson_7.htm" \l "note4). The ancient unfinished tower that the Neo-Babylonian kings Nabonpolassar and Nebuchadnezzar II restored is at Borsippa (also known as Birs-Nimrud), about 10 miles S.W. of the center of Babylon.  In a foundation corner of the site, archaeologists found a cylinder with a dedication inscription: *The tower of Borsippa, which a former king erected, and completed to a height of 42 cubits, whose summit he did not finish, fell to ruins in ancient times.  There was no proper care of its gutters for the water; rain and storms had washed away its brick, and the tiles of its roof were broken.  The great god Marduk urged me to restore it.  I did not alter its site, or change its foundations walls.  At a favorable time I renewed its brick work and its roofing tiles, and I wrote my name on the cornices of the edifice.  I built it anew as it had been ages before; I erected its pinnacle as it was in remote days* (*Halley's Bible Handbook,* page 83).

[5](http://www.agapebiblestudy.com/genesis/Lesson_7.htm" \l "note5). The modern Jewish Tanach (Jewish Old Testament) includes a notation of the tradition that Shem was Melchizedek in the footnotes (see the *Tanach:* Stone edition, note on page 29), and the record of this tradition is also found in the 1st century AD Targums, the Aramaic commentaries that accompanied the Old Testament text (i.e., *Babylonian Talmud, N'darim 32b*).  Also see *The Jewish New Testament Commentary,* page 679).