

Genesis 10:1-32

by John Calvin

John Calvin's sermon on Genesis 10 explores the genealogies of Noah's sons, emphasizing God's covenant and the dangers of ambition exemplified by Nimrod.

Scripture: Genesis 10:1-21

Topics: "Divine Providence", "Human Pride"

Description

John Calvin delves into the genealogies of the sons of Noah, highlighting the historical significance and the divine preservation of mankind after the flood. He emphasizes the importance of acknowledging God's power and goodness in restoring and sustaining humanity, despite their ingratitude and forgetfulness. Calvin reflects on the rise of Nimrod as a powerful and ambitious ruler, cautioning against the dangers of pride and tyranny. He also explores the beginning of Nimrod's kingdom in Babel, shedding light on the subsequent events that led to the dispersion of nations and the confusion of tongues.

Transcript

1. Now these are the generations of the sons of Noah, Shem, Ham, and Japheth: and unto them were sons born after the flood.
1. Porro istae sunt generationes filiorum Noah, Sem, Cham, et Jepheth: quibus nati sunt filii post diluvium.
2. The sons of Japheth; Gomer, and Magog, and Madai, and Javan, and Tubal, and Meshech, and Tiras.
2. Filii Jepheth, Gomer, et Magog, et Madai, et Javan, et Thubal, et Mesech, et Thiras.
3. And the sons of Gomer; Ashkenaz, and Riphath, and Togarmah.
3. Et filii Gomer, Ascenas, et Riphath, et Thogarmah.
4. And the sons of Javan; Elishah, and Tarshish, Kittim, and Dodanim.
4. Et filii Javan, Elisah, et Tharsis, Chitthim, Dodanim.
5. By these were the isles of the Gentiles divided in their lands; every one after his tongue, after their families, in their nations.

5. Ab istis separatae sunt insulae Gentium secundum terras suas, singulae secundum linguam suam, secundum familias suas, in gentibus suis.

6. And the sons of Ham; Cush, and Mizraim, and Phut, and Canaan.

6. Et filii Cham, Chus, et Misraim, et Phut, et Chanaan.

7. And the sons of Cush; Seba, and Havilah, and Sabtah, and Raamah, and Sabtecha: and the sons of Raamah; Sheba, and Dedan.

7. Et filii Chus, Seba, et Havilah, et Sabthah, et Rahamah, et Sabtecha. Filii autem Rahamah, Seba, et Dedan.

8. And Cush begat Nimrod: he began to be a mighty one in the earth.

8. Et Chus genuit Nimrod: ipse coepit esse potens in terra:

9. He was a mighty hunter before the LORD: wherefore it is said, Even as Nimrod the mighty hunter before the LORD.

9. Ipse fuit potens in venatione coram Jehova: idcirco dicitur, Sicut Nimrod poteus venatione coram Jehova.

10. And the beginning of his kingdom was Babel, and Erech, and Accad, and Calneh, in the land of Shinar.

10. Et fuit principium regni illius Babel, et Erech, et Achad, et Chalneh, in terra Sinhar.

11. Out of that land went forth Asshur, and builded Nineveh, and the city Rehoboth, and Calah,

11. E terra illa egressus est Assur, et aedificavit Nineven, et Rehoboth civitatem, et Chelah,

12. And Resen between Nineveh and Calah: the same is a great city

12. Et Resen inter Nineven et inter Chelah; ipsa est civitas magna.

13. And Mizraim begat Ludim, and Anamim, and Lehabim, and Naphtuhim,

13. Misraim autem genuit Ludim, et Hanamim, et Lehabim, et Naphthuhim,

14. And Pathrusim, and Casluhim, (out of whom came Philistim,) and Caphtorim.

14. Et Pathrusim, et Casluhim, unde egressi sunt Pelistim, et Chaphtorim.

15. And Canaan begat Sidon his firstborn, and Heth,

15. Et Chanaan genuit Sidon primogenitum suum, et Heth,

16. And the Jebusite, and the Amorite, and the Girgashite,

16. Et Jebusi, et Emori, et Girgasi,

17. And the Hivite, and the Arkite, and the Sinite,

17. Et Hivvi, et Arci, et Sini,

18. And the Arvadite, and the Zemarite, and the Hamathite: and afterward were the families of the Canaanites spread abroad.

18. Et Arvadi, et Semari, et Hamathi: et postea sparsae sunt familiae Chenaanaei.

19. And the border of the Canaanites was from Sidon, as thou comest to Gerar, unto Gaza; as thou goest, unto Sodom, and Gomorrah, and Admah, and Zeboim, even unto Lasha.

19. Et fuit terminus Chenaanaei a Sidon ingrediente to Gerar usque ad Hazzah, donec ingrediaris Sedom et Hamorah, et Admah, et Seboim, usque ad Lasah.

20. These are the sons of Ham, after their families, after their tongues, in their countries, and in their nations.

20. Isti filii Cham per familias suas, per linguas suas, in terris suis, in gentibus suis.

21. Unto Shem also, the father of all the children of Eber, the brother of Japheth the elder, even to him were children born.

21. Ipsi quoque Sem soboles, etiam ipse fuit pater omnium filiorum Eber, frater Jepheth major.

22. The children of Shem; Elam, and Asshur, and Arphaxad, and Lud, and Aram.

22. Filii Sem, Helam, et Assur, et Arphachsad, et Lud, et Aram.

23. And the children of Aram; Uz, and Hul, and Gether, and Mash.

23. Et filii Aram, Hus, et Hul, et Gether, et Mas.

24. And Arphaxad begat Salah; and Salah begat Eber.

24. Et Arphachsad genuit Selah, et Selah genuit Eber.

25. And unto Eber were born two sons: the name of one was Peleg; for in his days was the earth divided; and his brother's name was Joktan.

25. Et ipsi Eber nati sunt duo filii: nomen unius Peleg, quia in diebus ejus divisa est terra: et nomen fratris ejus Joctan.

26. And Joktan begat Almodad, and Sheleph, and Hazarmaveth, and Jerah,

26. Et Joctan genuit Almodad, et Seleph, et Hasarmaveth, et Jarah,

27. And Hadoram, and Uzal, and Diklah,

27. Et Hadoram, et Uzal, et Diclah,

28. And Obal, and Abimael, and Sheba,

28. Et Hobal, et Abimael, et Seba,

29. And Ophir, and Havilah, and Jobab: all these were the sons of Joktan.

29. Et Ophir, et Havilah, et Jobab: omnes isti filii Joctan.

30. And their dwelling was from Mesha, as thou goest unto Sephar a mount of the east.

30. Et fuit habitatio eorum a Mesah, donec ingrediaris Sephar, montem Orientis.

31. These are the sons of Shem, after their families, after their tongues, in their lands, after their nations.

31. Isti filii Sem per familias suas, per linguas suas, in terris suis, in gentibus suis.

32. These are the families of the sons of Noah, after their generations, in their nations: and by these were the nations divided in the earth after the flood.

32. Istae familiae filiorum Noah per generationes suas in gentibus suis: et ab istis divisae sunt gentes in terra post diluvium.

1. These are the generations . If any one pleases more accurately to examine the genealogies related by Moses in this and the following chapter, I do not condemn his industry. 306 And some interpreters have not unsuccessfully applied their diligence and study to this point. Let them enjoy, as far as I am concerned the reward of their labors. It shall, however, suffice for me briefly to allude to those things which I deem more useful to be noticed, and for the sake of which I suppose these genealogies to have been written by Moses.

First, in these bare names we have still some fragment of the history of the world; and the next chapter will show how many years intervened between the date of the deluge and the time when God made his covenant with Abraham. This second commencement of mankind is especially worthy to be known; and detestable is the ingratitude of those, who, when they had heard, from their fathers and grandfathers of the wonderful restoration of the world in so short a time, yet voluntarily became forgetful of the grace and the salvation of God.

Even the memory of the deluge was by the greater part entirely lost. Very few cared by what means or for what end they had been preserved. Many ages afterwards, seeing that the wicked forgetfulness of men had rendered them callous to the judgment and mercy of God, the door was opened to the lies of Satan by whose artifice it came to pass, that heathen poets scattered abroad futile and even noxious fables, by which the truth respecting God's works was adulterated. The goodness of God, therefore, wonderfully triumphed over the wickedness of men, in having granted a prolongation of life to beings so ungrateful, brutal, and barbarous.

Now, to captious men, (who yet do not think it absurd to refuse to acknowledge a Creator of the world,) such a sudden increase of mankind seems incredible, and therefore they ridicule it as fabulous. I grant, indeed, that if we choose to estimate what Moses relates by our own reason, it may be regarded as a fable; but they act very perversely who do not attend to the design of the Holy Spirit. For what else, I ask, did the Spirit intend, than that the offspring of three men should be increased, not by natural means, or in a common manner, but by the unwonted exercise of the power of God, for the purpose of replenishing the earth far and wide?

They who regard this miracle of God as fabulous on account of its magnitude, should much less believe that Noah and his sons, with their wives, breathed in the waters, and that animals lived nearly a whole year without sun and air. This then, is a gigantic madness, 307 to hold up to ridicule what is said respecting the restoration of the human race: for there the admirable power of God is displayed. How much better would it be, in the history of these events, -- which Noah saw with his own eyes, and not without great admiration, -- to behold God, to admire his power, to celebrate his goodness, and to acknowledge his hand, not less filled with mysteries in restoring, than in creating the world?

We must, however, observe, that in the three catalogues which Moses furnishes, 308 all the heads of the families are not enumerated; but those only, among the grandsons of Noah, are recorded, who were the princes of nations. For as any one excelled among his brethren, in talent, valor, industry, or other endowments, he obtained for himself a name and power, so that others, resting under his shadow, freely conceded to him the priority. Therefore, among the sons of Japheth, of Ham, and of Shem, Moses enumerates those only who had been celebrated, and by whose names the people were called.

Moreover, although no certain cause appears why Moses begins at Japheth, and descends in the second place to Ham, yet it is probable that the first place is given to the sons of Japheth, because they, having wandered over many regions, and having even crossed the sea, had receded farther from their country: and since these nations were less known to the Jews, therefore he alludes to them briefly. He assigns the second place to the sons of Ham, the knowledge of whom, on account of their vicinity, was more familiar to the Jews.

But since he had determined to weave the history of the Church in one continuous narrative, he postpones the progeny of Shem, from which the church flowed, to the last place. Wherefore, the order in which they are mentioned is not that of dignity; since Moses puts those first, whom he wished slightly to pass over, as obscure. Besides, we must observe, that the children of this world are exalted for a time, so that the whole earth seems as if it were made for their benefit, but their glory being transient vanishes away; while the Church, in an ignoble and despised condition, as if creeping on the ground, is yet divinely preserved, until at length, in his own time, God shall lift up her head.

I have already declared that I leave to others the scrupulous investigation of the names here mentioned. The reason of certain of them is manifest from the Scripture, such as Cush, Mizraim, Madai, Canaan, and the like: in respect to some others there are probable conjectures; in others, the obscurity is too great to allow of any certain conclusion; and those figments which interpreters adduce are, in part, very much distorted and forced; in part, vapid, and without any fair pretext.

Undoubtedly it seems to be the part of a frivolous curiosity to seek for certain and distinct nations in each of these names. 309 When Moses says, that the islands of the Gentiles were divided by the sons of Japheth, we understand that the regions beyond the sea were parted among them. For Greece and Italy, and other continental lands, -- as well as Rhodes and Cyprus, -- are called islands by the Hebrews, because the sea interposed. Whence we infer that we are sprung from those nations.

8. And Cush begat Nimrod . It is certain that Cush was the prince of the Ethiopians. Moses relates the singular history of his son Nimrod, because he began to be eminent in an unusual degree. Moreover, I thus interpret the passage, that the condition of men was at that time moderate; so that if some excelled others, they yet did not on that account domineer, nor assume to themselves royal power; but being content with a degree of dignity, governed others by civil laws and had more of authority than power. For

Justin, from Trogus Pompeius, declares this to have been the most ancient condition of the world. Now Moses says, that Nimrod, as if forgetting that he was a man, took possession of a higher post of honor. Noah was at that time yet living, and was certainly great and venerable in the eyes of all. There were also other excellent men; but such was their moderation, that they cultivated equality with their inferiors, who yielded them a spontaneous rather than a forced reverence. The ambition of Nimrod disturbed and broke through the boundaries of this reverence. Moreover, since it sufficiently appears that, in this sentence of Moses, the tyrant is branded with an eternal mark of infamy, we may hence conclude, how highly pleasing to God is a mild administration of affairs among men. And truly, whosoever remembers that he is a man, will gladly cultivate the society of others. With respect to the meaning of the terms, **ציד** (tsaid ,) properly signifies hunting , as the Hebrew grammarians state; yet it is often taken for food 310 But whether Moses says that he was robust in hunting, or in violently seizing upon prey; he metaphorically intimates that he was a furious man, and approximated to beasts rather than to men. The expression, "Before the Lord," 311 seems to me to declare that Nimrod attempted to raise himself above the order of men; just as proud men become transported by a vain self-confidence, that they may look down as from the clouds upon others.

Wherefore it is said 312 Since the verb is in the future tense, it may be thus explained, Nimrod was so mighty and imperious that it would be proper to say of any powerful tyrant, that he is another Nimrod. Yet the version of Jerome is satisfactory, that thence it became a proverb concerning the powerful and the violent, that they were like Nimrod. 313 Nor do I doubt that God intended the first author of tyranny to be transmitted to odium by every tongue.

10. And the beginning of his kingdom was Babel . Moses here designates the seat of Nimrod's empire. He also declares that four cities were subject to him; it is however uncertain whether he was the founder of them, or had thence expelled their rightful lords. And although mention is elsewhere made of Calneh, 314 yet Babylon was the most celebrated of all. I do not however think that it was of such wide extent, or of such magnificent structure, as the profane historians relate. But since the region was among the first and most fruitful, it is possible that the convenience of the situation would afterwards invite others to enlarge the city. Wherefore Aristotle, in his Politics , taking it out of the rank of cities, compares it to a province. Hence it has arisen, that many declare it to have been the work of Semiramis, by whom others say that it was not built but only adorned and joined together by bridges. The land of Shinar is added as a note of discrimination, because there was also another Babylon in Egypt, which is now called Cairo. 315 But it is asked, how was Nimrod the tyrant of Babylon, when Moses in the following chapter, Ge 11:1 subjoins, that a tower was begun there, which obtained this name from the confusion of tongues? Some suppose that a hysteron proteron 316 is here employed, and that what Moses is afterwards about to relate concerning the building of the tower was prior in the order of time. Moreover, they add, that because the building of the tower was disastrously obstructed, their design was changed to that of building a city. But I rather think there is a prolepsis ; and that Moses called the city by the same name, which afterwards was imposed by a more recent event. The reason of the conjecture is that probably, at this time, the inhabitants of that place, who had engaged in so vast a work, were numerous. It might also happen, that Nimrod, solicitous about his own fame and power, inflamed their insane desire by this pretext, that some famous monument should be erected in which their everlasting memory might remain. Still, since it is the custom of the Hebrews to prosecute more diffusely, afterwards, what they had touched upon briefly, I do not entirely reject the former opinion. 317

11. Out of that land went forth Asshur . It is credible that Asshur was one of the posterity of Shem. And the opinion has been commonly received, that he is here mentioned, because, when he was dwelling, in the neighborhood of Nimrod, he was violently expelled thence. In this manner, Moses would mark the barbarous ferocity of Nimrod. And truly these are the accustomed fruits of a greatness which does not keep within bounds; whence has arisen the old proverb, 'Great kingdoms are great robberies.' It is indeed necessary that some should preside over others; but where ambition, and the desire of rising higher than is right, are rampant, they not only draw with them the greatest and most numerous injuries, but also verge closely upon the dissolution of human society. Yet I rather adopt the opinion of those who say that Asshur is not, in this place, the name of a man, but of a country which derived its appellation from him; and thus the sense will be, that Nimrod, not content with his large and opulent kingdom, gave the reins to his cupidity, and pushed the boundaries of his empire even into Assyria, where he also built new cities. 318 The passage in Isaiah (Isa 23:13) is alone opposed to this opinion, where he says, 'Behold the land of the Chaldeans, the people was not, Asshur founded it when they inhabited the deserts, and he reduced it to ruin.' 319 For the prophet seems to say, that cities were built by the Assyrians in Chaldea, whereas previously, its inhabitants were wandering and scattered as in a desert. But it may be, that the prophet speaks of other changes of these kingdoms, which occurred afterwards. For, at the time in which the Assyrians maintained the sovereignty, seeing that they flourished in unbounded wealth, it is credible that Chaldea, which they had subjected to themselves was so adorned and increased by a long peace, that it might seem to have been founded by them. And we know, that when the Chaldeans, in their turn, seized on the empire, Babylon was exalted on the ruins of Nineveh.

21. Unto Shem also , the father of all the children of Eber . Moses, being about to speak of the sons of Shem, makes a brief introduction, which he had not done in reference to the others. Nor was it without reason; for since this was the race chosen by God, he wished to sever it from other nations by some special mark. This also is the reason why he expressly styles him the 'father of the sons of Eber,' and the elder brother of Japheth. 320 For the benediction of Shem does not descend to all his grandchildren indiscriminately, but remains in one family. And although the grandchildren themselves of Eber declined from the true worship of God, so that the Lord might justly have disinherited them; yet the benediction was not extinguished, but only buried for a season, until Abraham was called, in honor of whom this singular dignity is ascribed to the race and name of Eber. For the same cause, mention is made of Japheth, in order that the promise may be confirmed, 'God shall speak gently unto Japheth, that he may dwell in the tents of Shem.' Shem is not here called the brother of Ham, inasmuch as the latter was cut off from the fraternal order, and was debarred his own right. Fraternity remained only between them and Japheth; because, although they were separated, God had engaged that he would cause them to return from this dissension into union. As it respects the name Eber , they who deny it to be a proper name, but deduce it from the word which signifies to pass over , are more than sufficiently refuted by this passage alone.

Footnotes

306

For ample information on this interesting subject, which the general plan of Calvin's Commentary scarcely allowed him fully to investigate, the reader cannot do better than consult Dr. Wells' Geography of the Old Testament, chap. 3 From certain expressions contained in the Mosaic account here given, of the first settlement of nations after the flood, it is clear that the records of the chapter now before us, have reference to the state of things after the confusion of tongues at the building of the Tower of Babel, though the narration of this event occurs in the chapter following; for the settlements are said to be made

"according to their languages." But we know that before the attempt to build the tower, the whole earth was of "one language and of one speech;" and therefore the events here placed first, in the order of narration, were subsequent in the order of time. It may be proper here to observe, that according to the division of the earth into three great portions, Europe, Asia, and Africa, speaking generally, Japheth was the progenitor of the Europeans, Shem of the Asiatics, and Ham of the Africans. Yet this line of demarcation is not intended to be accurately drawn. The whole of Lesser Asia, for instance, falls within the province of the sons of Japheth; and Arabia within that of the sons of Ham. -- Ed.

307

"Hic ergo Cyclopicus est furor."

308

The first relating to the sons of Japheth the elder brother, from verse 2 to verse 6; the second, to the sons of Ham, from verse 6 to verse 21; the third, to the sons of Shem, from 21 to the end. Shem, though generally named first as a mark of Divine favor, is here placed last, because the subsequent history of Moses principally concerns this race; as Calvin properly argues. -- Ed.

309

Doubtless there is truth in these remarks of Calvin. Yet he seems to carry his objection too far. For it is one of the strongest possible confirmations of the truth of the Mosaic history, that (notwithstanding some inevitable obscurity) there should be such a mass of undeniable evidence still existing, that the world was really divided in the manner here described. Far more nations than Calvin supposed may, with the highest degree of probability, be traced upward to the progenitors whose names are here recorded. See Wells' Geography, Mede's Works, and Bishop Patrick's Commentary. A list of the names, with the supposed corresponding nations, is also given in the Commentary of Professor Bush on this chapter. The following extract from Hengstenberg's 'Egypt, and the Books of Moses,' also bears upon this point: -- "It has often been asserted that the genealogical table in Genesis 10. cannot be from Moses: since so extended a knowledge of nations lies far beyond the geographical horizon of the Mosaic age. This hypothesis must now be considered as exploded. The new discoveries and investigations in Egypt have shown that they maintained, even from the most ancient times, a vigorous commerce with other nations, and sometimes with very distant nations. ...But not merely, in general, do the investigations in Egyptian antiquities favor the belief that Moses was the author of the account in this tenth chapter of Genesis. On the Egyptian monuments, those especially which represent the conquests of the ancient Pharaohs over foreign nations, ... not a few names have been found which correspond with those contained in the chapter before us." The learned author then proceeds to adduce instances in proof of his position, which the reader may consult with advantage. -- See Hengstenberg's Egypt, and the Books of Moses, chap. v2 p. 195 -- Ed.

310

"■■■■ Metaphorice cibus venatione partus, aut quovis modo paratus, praeter panem." -- Schindler . -- Ed

311

Some translate it, "Against the Lord;" yet, perhaps, the words will hardly bear this rendering. -- Ed.

312

"Qua propter dicetur," etc., "Wherefore it shall be said" In Calvin's text it is, "Idcirco dicitur," "Wherefore it is said."

313

"Ob hoc exivit proverbium, Quasi Nemrod robustus venator eoram Domino." -- Vulgate

314

Am 6:2.

315

"Quam hodie Cairum vocant." -- "Babylon was a habitation formed by the Persians, which may with probability be referred to the time of the conquest of Egypt by Cambyses. A quarter retaining the name of Baboul or Babilon, in the city commonly called Old Cairo, which overlooks the Nile at some distance above the Delta, shows its true position." -- D'Anville's Ancient Geography, vol. 2 p. 152. -- Ed

316

■στερον πρ■τερον, is when that which really comes last in the order of time, is for some reason put first in the order of narration. -- Ed

317

A reason why the former of these opinions is to be preferred will be found in a note at page 313, where it is stated that the division of tongues had already taken place, before these nations were settled. -- Ed.

318

See the marginal reading of the English version -- 'He went out into Assyria.'

319

Bishop Lowth's translation of the passage is as follows: --

"Behold the land of the Chaldeans;

This people was of no account;

(The Assyrian founded it for the inhabitants of the desert;

They raised the watch-towers, they set up the palaces thereof;)

This people hath reduced her to ruin."

See also his note on this passage, which accords with Calvin's supposition, that the prophet referred to some subsequent period of history. -- Ed.

320

In the English translation it is, 'The brother of Japheth the elder.' The balance of proof seems to lie in favor of the English translation, and gives the seniority to Japheth. Shem is supposed to be placed first, not on

account of his age, but because his was the chosen seed. -- Ed.

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