

Genesis

All Nations and Babel

Lesson #5 for April 30, 2022

Scriptures: Genesis 1:28; 9:1; 9:18-11:9; Matthew 1:1-17; Luke 1:26-33; 10:1; Psalm 139:7-12.

1. The biblical record focused on single individuals prior to the record of the events of the flood. But, after the flood, Noah's three sons are the focus of attention. Ham, the father of Canaan, (Genesis 10:6,15) is the start of the biblical discussion of **Canaan, "the promised land,"** (Genesis 12:5) the place where Abraham would go later and where God promised him a future through his descendants. From Canaan, blessings were to extend to all nations, (Genesis 12:3) meaning to all people.
2. The long-term focus for Genesis is God and His friend, Abram/Abraham, who followed God in spite of the influence of his family. Eventually, through Abraham would come the promised Seed, the Savior. However, the short-term topic of this section of Genesis is Noah and his family. What was God's plan for Noah and his descendants after the flood? They were supposed to scatter over the earth and repopulate the world.
3. Do we correctly understand Genesis 9:18-27?

Genesis 9:18-27: ¹⁸ The sons of Noah who went out of the boat were Shem, Ham, and Japheth. (Ham was the father of Canaan.) ¹⁹**These three sons of Noah were the ancestors of all the people on earth.**

²⁰ **Noah, who was a farmer, was the first man to plant a vineyard.** ²¹After he drank some of the wine, **he became drunk**, took off his clothes, and lay naked in his tent. ²²When Ham, the father of Canaan, saw that his father was naked, he went out and told his two brothers. ²³Then Shem and Japheth took a robe and held it behind them on their shoulders. They walked backwards into the tent and covered their father, keeping their faces turned away so as not to see him naked. ²⁴When Noah was sober again and learnt what his youngest son had done to him, ²⁵he said, "A curse on Canaan!

He will be a slave to his brothers.

²⁶ Give praise to the LORD, the God of Shem!

Canaan will be the slave of Shem.

²⁷ May God cause Japheth to increase!

May his descendants live with the people of Shem!

Canaan will be the slave of Japheth."—American Bible Society. (1992). *The Holy Bible: The Good News Translation** (2nd ed., Genesis 9:18-27). New York: American Bible Society [abbreviated as *Good News Bible*].^{††} [We need to deal more with Noah and the drinking of wine which we just read about.][‡]

Genesis 9:21-22: ²¹After he drank some of the wine, **he became drunk**, took off his clothes, and lay naked in his tent. ²²When Ham, the father of Canaan, saw that his father was naked, he went out and told his two brothers.—*Good News Bible*.^{*†}

4. Do you think Noah had been drunk before this occasion? Did he and his sons understand what had happened and why he was drunk? Did he have any idea about alcohol and what its effects were? Remember that Noah was 601 when this happened. Or, was that an accidental occurrence? The vines that Noah planted must have been carried on the ark during the flood. Does that suggest that Noah should have known about alcohol from events before the flood? (See Genesis 9:20 as above.)
5. It is interesting to note that Noah's act following drinking of that wine echoes in some respects Adam and Eve's story in the Garden of Eden. In both cases there was an eating of the fruit, or its juice, resulting in nakedness. In both cases there followed a covering, then a curse, and then a blessing.
6. What did Ham see? And what did he do?

This parallel suggests that Ham did not just "see" furtively, by accident, his father's nakedness. He went around and talked about it, without even trying to take care of his father's problem. In contrast, his brothers' immediate reaction to cover their father, while Ham left him naked, implicitly denounced Ham's actions.

The issue at stake here is more about the respect of one's parents. Failure to honor your parents, who represent your past, will affect your future (*Exod. 20:12; compare with Eph. 6:2*). Hence the curse, which will influence Ham's future and that of his son Canaan.—*Adult Sabbath School Bible Study Guide*^{*} for Sunday, April 24.[§]

Exodus 20:12: "Respect your father and your mother, so that you may live a long time in the land that I am giving you."—*Good News Bible*.^{*}

Ephesians 6:2: "Respect your father and mother" is the first commandment that has a promise added.—*Good News Bible*.^{*}

7. Did Ham's action suggest that he had lost respect for his father and his mother?
[From the Bible study guide=BSG:] **The curse upon Ham's son** (*Gen. 9:25*) ultimately turns out to be a message of hope. Genesis 9:25 often has been disastrously **misapplied to Africans or those of African descent**, and, thus, has been used as a religious justification for slavery. However, this bigoted interpretation does not hold, for two reasons. **First**, the curse does not concern Ham but his son Canaan. Neither does this curse concern Cush, the firstborn son of Ham, which immediately excludes the reference to those of African descent or Africans in particular. Incidentally, biblical genealogies (see the table of nations in Genesis 10) are more about

ethnogeography (that is, the geographic distribution of human groups) than about ethnicity, which deals with the origin of human races and languages. **The very notion of “race” derives from the pseudoscientific racist and linguistic theories of the nineteenth century, based on the theory of evolution, another evil to arise from this modern creation myth.** Thus, the biblical designations of people groups as “Japhetite,” “Semitic,” or “Hamitic” do not follow clear criteria of race as defined by evolution but are much more complex and blurred. For example: although Canaanite languages are Semitic, Canaan is counted among the Hamites. Although Cush is a descendant of Ham, he is the father of Nimrod, the founder of Babel. Elam, who belongs to a non-Semitic people, is a son of Shem.

The **second** reason that Genesis 9:25 does not apply to Africans or those of African descent is that the reference to Canaan is **an allusion to the inheritance of the Promised Land**, with all that this land symbolizes, concerning the promise of salvation for the world. In this context, the use of the phrase “servant of servants” is ironic. “Servant of servants” is a superlative, meaning “the servant par excellence,” and suggests a spiritual direction, pointing to **Jesus, the Servant of servants who comes to save the world** (*John 13:5*).—*Adult Teachers Sabbath School Bible Study Guide** 65-66.†§

John 13:5: Then he poured some water into a basin and began to wash the disciples’ feet and dry them with the towel round his waist.—*Good News Bible*.*

8. We say that Jesus was a Jew, and both of His genealogies—recorded in Matthew 1 and Luke 3—suggest that. But, don’t those lines of descent trace down from father to son? If so, is Jesus a Jew? Who was His Father?
9. Why do the Hebrews think **genealogies** are so important?

The biblical genealogy has three functions. **First**, it emphasizes the historical nature of the biblical events, which are related to **real people** who lived and died and whose days are precisely numbered. **Second**, it demonstrates the continuity from antiquity to the contemporary time of the writer, establishing a clear link from the past to the “present.” **Third**, it reminds us of human fragility and of the tragic effect of sin’s curse and its deadly results on all the generations that have followed.—*Adult Sabbath School Bible Study Guide** for Monday, April 25.†

10. The genealogies tell us that Adam died when Lamech, Noah’s father, was 56 years old. We need to be honest about those numbers and ages. There is a lot of disagreement about those numbers. Some ancient translations have different ages for those early inhabitants of this earth. Did they understand the truth about those ages better than we do? Their number system was based on 6 instead of 10. The way their numbers were

written was very different as well. We cannot be sure that we understand all of that correctly. Lamech may have known Adam and surely heard stories about the Garden of Eden, etc. Don't you think he would have told those to Noah?

11. Genesis 10 gives a long list of the descendants of Japheth, Ham, and Shem. Notice in verse 21 it says that "Shem, the older brother of Japheth, was the ancestor of all the Hebrews." (*GNB**) Putting all this information together, we see that **Shem was the eldest, then Japheth, and then Ham.**
12. As noted above, Jesus had two genealogies recorded for Him, one in Matthew 1 and the other in Luke 3. Why do you think there is such a big difference between the list of names in Matthew 1 and the list in Luke 3? There is actually very little correspondence between the two, except in the early years. See the two-page handout on the genealogy of Jesus at https://www.theox.org/images/uploads/bnt/KHart_BTGA_PDF_Gosp_Gos_Genealogy_Jesus_16.pdf
13. We come next to the story of the **tower of Babel.**

Genesis 11:1-4: ¹ At first, the **people of the whole world** had only one language and used the same words. [We have no idea what language that was!] ²As they wandered about in the East, they came to a plain in Babylonia and settled there. ³They said to one another, "Come on! Let's make bricks and bake them hard." So they had bricks to build with and tar to hold them together. ⁴They said, "Now let's build a city with a tower that reaches the sky, **so that we can make a name for ourselves** and not be scattered all over the earth."—*Good News Bible*.^{*††}

14. When they came out of the ark, God had commanded them to have many children and to scatter throughout the entire world.

Genesis 9:1: God blessed Noah and his sons and said, "Have many children, **so that your descendants will live all over the earth.**"—*Good News Bible*.^{*†}

15. What was God to do when again, even after the "emergency measure" of the flood, the people did not follow His directions?

Genesis 11:5-9: ⁵ Then **the LORD came down to see** the city and the tower which those men had built, ⁶and he said, "Now then, these are all one people and they speak one language; **this is just the beginning of what they are going to do. Soon they will be able to do anything they want!** ⁷Let us go down and **mix up their language** so that they will not understand one another." ⁸**So the LORD scattered them all over the earth**, and they stopped building the city. ⁹The city was called Babylon, because there the LORD mixed up the language of all the people, and from there he scattered them all over the earth.—*Good News Bible*.^{*†}

16. There certainly could not have been more than a relatively few people living on the earth at that time. Looking carefully at the verses we just read and comparing them with the record of creation in Genesis 1, we discover that these tower builders were using the

language describing God in creation. They said, “Let us make a name for ourselves.” Remember that God had said at creation, “Let us make man in our image.” That Hebrew expression is used elsewhere in the Bible only of God. (See Isaiah 63:12,14.)

17. Do we know of any other creature who wanted to make a name for himself and even tried to replace God? None other than Satan himself! See Isaiah 14:14. **The people who built the tower of Babel were following right in the footsteps of Lucifer/Satan.**
18. It is interesting to note that they were trying to build that tower in the Valley of Shinar. It was there that Nebuchadnezzar later built his statue. Nebuchadnezzar tried to force the whole world to worship his statue of gold. Daniel 2:43; Daniel 11:43-45; and Revelation 16:14-16 tell us that in the end time, “Babylon” will also try to do the same.

A famous secular French writer in the past century said the great purpose of humanity was to try “to be God.” What is it about us, starting with Eve in Eden (*Gen. 3:5*), that gets drawn into this dangerous lie?—*Adult Sabbath School Bible Study Guide** for Tuesday, April 26.[§]

19. Human beings have tried in many ways to reach up and somehow approach God. But, the truth is that God has to come way down in order to help us. Remember Jacob’s ladder.

The descent of God reminds us also of the principle of righteousness by faith and of the process of God’s grace. Whatever work we may perform for God, He will still have to come down to meet with us. It is not what we do for God that will bring us to Him and to redemption. Instead, it is God’s move toward us that will save us. In fact, the text in Genesis talks twice about God going “down,” which seems to imply how much He cared about what was happening there.

According to the text, the Lord wanted to put an end to the people’s deep-seated unity, which—given their fallen state—could lead only to more and more evil. That’s why **He chose to confuse their languages**, which would bring an end to their united schemes.—*Adult Sabbath School Bible Study Guide** for Wednesday, April 27.[†] [Try to imagine how that happened and how people reacted!][‡]

The schemes of the Babel builders ended in shame and defeat. The monument to their pride became the memorial of their folly. **Yet men are continually pursuing the same course—depending upon self, and rejecting God’s law. It is the principle that Satan tried to carry out in heaven; the same that governed Cain in presenting his offering.**—Ellen G. White, *Patriarchs and Prophets** 123.3.[†]

20. Why did God want to scatter human beings across the earth? He gave that instruction by or before the end of the flood. Reading again:

Genesis 11:8-9: ⁸So the LORD scattered them all over the earth, and they stopped building the city. ⁹The city was called Babylon, because there the LORD

mixed up the language of all the people, and from there **he scattered them all over the earth.**—*Good News Bible*.*†

[BSG:] God's design and blessing for humans was that they would " 'multiply, and fill the earth' " (*Gen. 9:1, NKJV; compare with Gen. 1:28, NKJV*). **Against God's plan**, the builders of Babel preferred to stick together as the same people. One reason they said they wanted to build the city was so that they would not " 'be scattered abroad over the face of the whole earth' " (*Gen. 11:4, NKJV*). They refused to move elsewhere, perhaps thinking that together they would be more powerful than they would be separated and scattered. And, in one sense, they were right.

Unfortunately, **they sought to use their united power for evil, not good.** They wanted to " 'make a name for ourselves,' " a powerful reflection of their own arrogance and pride. Indeed, whenever humans, in open defiance of God, want to " 'make a name' " for themselves, we can be sure it won't turn out well. It never has.—*Adult Sabbath School Bible Study Guide** for Thursday, April 28.†‡§

21. Consider more from the Bible study guide:

Interestingly enough, the name *Babel*, which means "door of God," is related to the verb *balal*, which means "confuse." (Genesis 11:9) It is because they wanted to reach the "door" of God and because they thought of themselves as God, that they ended up confused and much less powerful than before.—*Adult Sabbath School Bible Study Guide** for Thursday, April 28.§

The men of Babel had determined to establish a government that should be independent of God. There were some among them, however, who feared the Lord, but who had been deceived by the pretensions of the ungodly and drawn into their schemes. **For the sake of these faithful ones the Lord delayed His judgments and gave the people time to reveal their true character.** [God always is very patient.] As this was developed, the sons of God labored to turn them from their purpose; but the people were fully united in their Heaven-daring undertaking. **Had they gone on unchecked, they would have demoralized the world in its infancy.** Their confederacy was founded in rebellion; a kingdom established for self-exaltation, but in which God was to have no rule or honor.—Ellen G. White, *Patriarchs and Prophets** 123.1.†‡ [They were determined to get rid of God! Does that sound familiar?][‡]

22. How often do we try to make a name for ourselves? And why do we seem to want to do that?

[From the writings of Ellen White=EGW:] They decided to build a city, and in it a tower of such stupendous height.... These enterprises were designed

to prevent the people from scattering abroad in colonies. **God had directed men to disperse throughout the earth, to replenish and subdue it; but these Babel builders determined to keep their community united in one body, and to found a monarchy that should eventually embrace the whole earth.** Thus their city would become the metropolis of a universal empire; its glory would command the admiration and homage of the world and render the founders illustrious. **The magnificent tower, reaching to the heavens, was intended to stand as a monument of the power and wisdom of its builders, perpetuating their fame to the latest generations.**

The dwellers on the plain of Shinar disbelieved God's covenant that He would not again bring a flood upon the earth. [They did not trust God.] Many of them denied the existence of God and attributed the Flood to the operation of natural causes. Others believed in a Supreme Being, and that it was He who had destroyed the antediluvian world; and their hearts, like that of Cain, rose up in rebellion against Him. **One object before them in the erection of the tower was to secure their own safety in case of another deluge. By carrying the structure to a much greater height than was reached by the waters of the Flood, they thought to place themselves beyond all possibility of danger. And as they would be able to ascend to the region of the clouds, they hoped to ascertain the cause of the Flood. The whole undertaking was designed to exalt still further the pride of its projectors and to turn the minds of future generations away from God and lead them into idolatry.**—Ellen G. White, *Patriarchs and Prophets** 118.5-119.1.^{†‡} [What would happen to dried brick if a flood came again? Did Ellen White see all of this in vision?][‡]

23. **As a church, do we ever try to make a name for “ourselves”?**

The God of the nations, the Creator of the world, and the Lord of Israel is the same God. This observation has two important theological implications. **First**, it means that God affects history even beyond the realms of religion. God also is present among the nations. **Second**, it means that the salvation of the nations also depends on the testimony of Israel. The blessing of the nations will be realized only through Israel (*Gen. 12:3*), for only the God of Israel is the true God (*John 4:22, 23; NKJV*). The lessons of the Hebrew Bible, the history of Israel, and the events that happened to the Jews and that were recorded in the New Testament are of redemptive significance for the nations.—*Adult Teachers Sabbath School Bible Study Guide** 67.^{†§}

Genesis 12:3: [The LORD said to Abraham:] “I will bless those who bless you, But I will curse those who curse you.

And **through you I will bless all the nations.**”—*Good News Bible*.^{*†‡}

John 4:22-23: [Jesus said to the Samaritan woman at the well:]²² “You Samaritans do not really know whom you worship; but we Jews know whom we worship, because it is from the Jews that salvation comes.²³ **But the time is coming and is already here, when by the power of God’s Spirit people will worship the Father as he really is, offering him the true worship that he wants.**”—*Good News Bible*.*†

24. There are two curses mentioned soon after the end of the flood: (1) The curse on Ham’s descendant, Canaan, (Genesis 9:21-22); and (2) The curse that followed the building of the tower of Babel. (Genesis 11:9)

25. Before the children of Israel entered the land of Canaan, it was rife with immoral behavior and fertility cult religion. For example, see Genesis 19:5-7,31-35, recounting the story of Lot and the visiting angels in Sodom and afterward.

Genesis 19:5-7,31-35: ⁵They called out to Lot and asked, “Where are the men who came to stay with you tonight? Bring them out to us!” The men of Sodom wanted to have sex with them.

⁶ Lot went outside and closed the door behind him. ⁷He said to them, “Friends, I beg you, don’t do such a wicked thing!” ...

³¹The elder daughter said to her sister, “Our father is getting old, and there are no men in the whole world to marry us so that we can have children.

³²Come on, let’s make our father drunk, so that we can sleep with him and have children by him.” ³³That night they gave him wine to drink, and the elder daughter had intercourse with him. But he was so drunk that he didn’t know it. [Why didn’t they go to Abraham’s home?]

³⁴ The next day the elder daughter said to her sister, “I slept with him last night; now let’s make him drunk again tonight, and you sleep with him. Then each of us will have a child by our father.” ³⁵So that night they made him drunk, and the younger daughter had intercourse with him. Again he was so drunk that he didn’t know it.—*Good News Bible*.*†

In addition, the curse contains a promise of blessing, playing on the name “Canaan,” which is derived from the verb *kana’*, meaning “subdue.” It is through the subduing of Canaan that God’s people, the descendants of Shem, will enter the Promised Land and prepare the way for the coming of the Messiah, who will enlarge Japheth “in the tents of Shem” (*Gen. 9:27*). This is a prophetic allusion to the expansion of God’s covenant to all nations, which will embrace Israel’s message of salvation to the world (*Dan. 9:27, Isa. 66:18–20, Rom. 11:25*). The curse of Ham will, in fact, be a blessing for all nations, including whichever descendants of Ham and Canaan accept the salvation offered them by the Lord.—*Adult Sabbath School Bible Study Guide** for Sunday, April 24.[§]

26. Think of the challenges that God faced dealing with these people. Soon after the flood, curses were multiplying. Fortunately, God can sometimes turn curses into good things. Many years later, Paul recognized that even in bad situations, God can work for good.

Romans 8:28: We know that **in all things God works for good** with those who love him, those whom he has called according to his purpose.—*Good News Bible*.*†

27. The curse on the people of the land of Canaan meant that, one day, it would become the home of God's faithful people. From that location the gospel was to—and has—spread to the entire world.

28. But, of course, we know that things did not always go well for the children of Israel. Paul, recognizing that, said:

Romans 11:25: There is a secret truth, my brothers and sisters, which I want you to know, for it will keep you from thinking how wise you are. It is that the stubbornness of the people of Israel is not permanent, but will last only until the complete number of Gentiles comes to God.—*Good News Bible*.*

29. The land of Canaan ended up being the home of the descendants of Abraham and the future home of Jesus, the Author of our salvation. The scattering of people after the building of the tower of Babel provided for the population of nations around the world.

30. **The story of the tower of Babel is one of the many stories in the Bible that suggest that God can get people's attention for a little while by a show of force or power; however, the results never last very long.** The first **inhabitants of Babylon built the tower of Babel not because they did not believe in God, but because they did not trust Him!** They were trying to escape His power! Often, in more modern times, some have suggested that if God would just step in and use His power to take charge of things, people would respect and reverence Him more. The story of the tower of Babel should teach us that the use of force never accomplishes what God wants most; **the use of force never brings freedom, love, and trust.**

31. What are we supposed to learn from the story of Babel? What were the people of Babel trying to accomplish for themselves? Were they trying to make a name for themselves? Were they trying to set up leaders and an organization in opposition to God? Were they trying to protect themselves from another flood? Did they believe God's statement that He would not send another worldwide flood? Or, were they primarily trying to reach the clouds to determine where all that water had come from?

32. Repeatedly, down through history, humans have tried to join together to form what would, in effect, be totalitarian societies, leaving no room for differences of opinion or disagreements. We think of the story of Babel and down through history to the caesars and all the way down to modern day megalomaniacs. Do you know anyone in modern history who has tried to do something like what they were trying to do at the tower of Babel? Why is it the people who start out with great ideas, seeking to be holy, united, and

professors of truth often become intolerant and proud? Jesus inspires us to live like Him and avoid that mistake.

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