

Genesis 10

10:1 These are the generations of the sons of Noah, Shem, Ham, and Japheth; sons were born to them after the flood. **2** The sons of Japheth: Gomer, Magog, Madai, Javan, Tubal, Meshech, and Tiras. **3** The sons of Gomer: Ash'kenaz, Riphath, and Togar'mah. **4** The sons of Javan: Eli'shah, Tarshish, Kittim, and Do'danim. **5** From these the coastland peoples spread. These are the sons of Japheth in their lands, each with his own language, by their families, in their nations. **6** The sons of Ham: Cush, Egypt, Put, and Canaan. **7** The sons of Cush: Seba, Hav'ilah, Sabtah, Ra'amah, and Sab'teca. The sons of Ra'amah: Sheba and Dedan. **8** Cush became the father of Nimrod; he was the first on earth to be a mighty man. **9** He was a mighty hunter before the LORD; therefore it is said, "Like Nimrod a mighty hunter before the LORD." **10** The beginning of his kingdom was Ba'bel, Erech, and Accad, all of them in the land of Shinar. **11** From that land he went into Assyria, and built Nin'veh, Reho'both-Ir, Calah, and **12** Resen between Nin'veh and Calah; that is the great city. **13** Egypt became the father of Ludim, An'amim, Leha'bim, Naph-tu'him, **14** Pathru'sim, Caslu'him (whence came the Philistines), and Caph'torim.

Since according to the Genesis story of the flood all humans except Noah, his wife, his sons, and his daughters-in-law drowned, it really is through Noah that all the nations of the world come to exist as was noted in Genesis 9:19. All other lines of humans – including Cain's were destroyed by the flood. So whatever accomplishments they did, or skills they learned or cities they built, would have died with them. Here in Genesis 10 comes the story of the nations – of populating the world with different people all of the same stock. This chapter does offer a family tree for all of the known people of the ancient Jewish world.

Japheth's descendents include those people who occupy Asia Minor and territories to the East.

"...each with his own language..." This text seems to suggest the occurrence of diverse languages and nations was simply a natural process of expansion. The text seems unaware of the tower of Ba'bel story which explains the confusion of tongues among humans as a result of human arrogance and sin. Here at the beginning of Genesis 10 the multiplication of language has nothing to do with punishment but with the diversification of humanity as it spread throughout the world.

The list is fathers and sons. Wives/mothers are not even mentioned let alone named. No sisters are mentioned either making one wonder where the women who gave birth to all of these sons were coming from.

Ham gives birth to the founders of many great nations and kingdoms which included Arabia, Egypt and Africa. Because Ham defiled Noah, is there some sense of prejudice indicated in the fact that Ham's descendents include Arabs and Africans? The "Land of Ham" will become in the Old Testament another way for the Israelites to speak of Egypt. Canaan who is cursed into servitude to his uncles has plenty of brothers to witness his enslavement. Ham's other sons are not cursed by Noah and show great promise and success in starting great nations.

"Nimrod a mighty hunter" This is the first mention in Genesis of a hunter and the first indication that humans are killing animals for food. Hunting would by implication also suggest the development of hunting tools to capture and

God Questions His Creation: Genesis 10

kill animals, which would be the precursor to weapons of war. Nimrod the hunter begins the Kingdom of Ba'bel, which is the ancient Jewish reference for Babylon. Indeed one day the Babylonians will hunt down the Jews.

The genealogies. Scholars have noted that Americans (with their disinterest in history and their constant striving for what is new, ever looking hopefully to the future) have a hard time grasping the biblical sense of time. In the Old Testament one is always facing the past. The past is what is before us, it is the only thing that we can see for it already exists and is known. The future on the other hand does not exist yet, so it cannot be seen; the future in this thinking is thus always behind us, out of our vision, the unknown, waiting to catch us by surprise. The genealogies help keep the past right in front of us. The Old Testament keeps us looking to the past in order to help us see truth and to give us hope for the future. The genealogies put before us what we can see – that which already exists/existed. They connect us to all that is real and known, and we learn from history about ourselves and our mistakes. In this thinking what can be seen is what we can remember, and what we can remember is what we can truly see. Remembrance and seeing are thus the same thing. The Divine Liturgy is the Christian remembrance (**anamnesis**). When we remember as Christians we see what we remember, we make Christ present before us – Christ crucified and Christ risen. The priest prays at the Liturgy: “Remembering this saving commandment and all those things which have come to pass for us: the Cross, the Tomb, the Resurrection on the third day, the Ascension into heaven, the sitting at the right hand, and the second and glorious coming.” We remember in order to see the reality of God in the world. We remember what God has done so that we can have hope that God will act again as He has done in the past. The future does not yet exist for us ephemeral beings, so we cannot see what God will do, but we can see clearly what He has done and from this know where He is leading us. Remembering the past is thus the firm foundation for hope and faith. We call to remembrance salvation, which means we can see salvation – what God has done - for it is real, even if it is but the tip of the iceberg, the foretaste of the kingdom which is to come. The Christian Liturgy, especially that of St. Basil the Great, is a true calling to remembrance all that

God has done for us so that we can see salvation, see God's hand in the world, see the breaking into the world of the Kingdom of God. Knowing what God has done is the firm foundation for our hope in what God is going to do. Yet it is happening in time, and so we often experience it as happening way too slowly. But the reality of salvation is that we need to fit eternity and divinity into our world, into that which is “not God”, into our lives, into our hearts. That takes time – not because God needs time, but we do and we can only receive things in time. God enters the world through the incarnation – it took the history of humanity to bring about the Theotokos, the one who could receive God into her womb. Then it took nine more months for the Incarnate Word to be born and a lifetime for him to mature; it now additionally takes the time of the Holy Spirit to allow God's Kingdom to be revealed in the world. Each Liturgy reminds us of what has happened, so that we can see it, and understand it is coming. We are to be thankful for what we know is coming even if it also requires infinite patience on our part. We remember the past not to recapture some Golden Age, but rather as Fr. John Behr says, to help us envision the future. What we can see of what God has done speaks to us about how much more glorious is what He is doing. “Beloved, we are God's children now; it does not yet appear what we shall be, but we know that when he appears we shall be like him, for we shall see him as he is” (1 John 3:2). As St. Paul has it, “one thing I do, forgetting what lies behind and straining forward to what lies ahead, I press on toward the goal for the prize of the upward call of God in Christ Jesus” (Philippians 3:13-14).

Genealogies are often skimmed through by modern readers of the Bible because they are somewhat boring and not particularly pertinent to life. St. Jerome (d. 420AD) saw the writers of Scripture as “the inspired vehicles of the divine mysteries” and so felt it important for us to pay attention to all of the historical details and peculiarities of their written words as they offer us insight into the person who is God's chosen vessel for the sacred mysteries. It is an interesting concept for it emphasizes that the authors of Scripture are more the vehicle of the divine mysteries (as they are who is inspired by God) than are the written words themselves. Their written words are almost a feeble attempt to record the inspiration which is really contained

God Questions His Creation: Genesis 10

in humans not mostly in a book. The written words thus in their details offer us insight into the inspired saint who wrote the text. This is a common idea found in the Christians of the early centuries: the Scriptures are mere signs which point to the spiritual reality, the real substance, God's revelation. Thus they don't equate God's revelation to the words themselves but to the reality to which the words direct our attention. This very subtle and nuanced approach to the Bible helps prevent them from reading the text in a wooden or overly literal way. It is not the words which are so important – they point to the truth which we are seeking. In a certain sense it prevents what happens sometimes to modern fundamentalist and biblical literalists – Bibliolatry. The text contains the revelation but is not to be equated with it, for the revelation is always beyond the limits of the written word.

Genealogies help establish an orderly succession of fathers to son in civil society, and become the basis for tradition – that common knowledge and wisdom which humans pass down from generation to generation. But in early Christianity they also were the source of controversy and argument. In Titus 3:9, we are warned, "But avoid stupid controversies, genealogies, dissensions, and quarrels over the law, for they are unprofitable and futile." A very similar warning is found in 1 Timothy 1:3-4: "charge certain persons not to teach any different doctrine, nor to occupy themselves with myths and endless genealogies which promote speculations rather than the divine training that is in faith." Genealogies which for the modern reader often appear boring and uninteresting were obviously at one time the seedbed for speculation which led to quarrels and dissension in the Church. Interests in and emphases on different passages of Scripture do change over time and in different cultures. This does give witness for the importance of understanding how Christians in previous times read and used the Bible – it helps us avoid being limited by or trapped in our contemporary culture and thinking. Aspects of the Scripture which were important, even critically, in ancient times are often glossed over by our modern sensibilities and lack of historical depth.

No matter how diverse the people are in terms of nations, geography, languages, what is stunning in the genealogies and the first 11 chapters of Genesis is the absolute monotheism

of this ancient text. There is only one God. Satan is not mentioned, neither are demons. The gods of the nations are not mentioned. Angels are not mentioned. Idols are not mentioned. There is no other spiritual being but the Lord God. There is no celestial hierarchy in the first eleven chapters of Genesis. The text establishes absolute monotheism – there are no other beings even close to God and not cosmic battle between God and evil. Chaos exists which God is able to shape, contain and control for His own purposes. Chaos is impersonal, not an evil one. The only indication in these early chapters of Genesis of something other than the One God is found in Genesis 1:26 and 11:7 in which God speaks in the plural, "let us..." Christians have understood this to be a clear reference to the Trinitarian nature of God within the Jewish scriptures. All the peoples of the world no matter how diverse have only one God. This is another way in which the genealogies tie all of humanity together. Our oneness with Adam is not so much a genetic thing; it is an issue that we all were created by the one God who is Creator of heaven and earth and of all things visible and invisible. There are no other gods or spiritual beings. There is none of the heavenly mythologies that are so common in virtually every other ancient religion. There is no mention of astrology or any form of the worship of the heavenly bodies. The entire opening chapters of Genesis are focused on this one God and His particular interest in and relationship with a very select group of people – a lineage that is completely tied in with the God of the universe.

Genealogies especially confront one of the most tenaciously held entitlements of modern capitalistic man: self interest. Adam Smith felt the very thing that will drive capitalism for the benefit of each person is self interest. And we now assume our personal self interest to be a main reason why we would participate in anything. The self is king and god with each person living in an egocentric universe. The genealogies tell us God has chosen certain individuals other than ourselves to be His chosen people and to serve the unique requirements of the Kingdom. We read the genealogies to realize how many people God has chosen and worked with, and that not everything is governed by self interest. Even Christ told us the two main laws were to love God and to love neighbor. It is not always about me. Salvation is learning about something

God Questions His Creation: Genesis 10

greater than my self and my self interests. It is learning that my story is but a sentence is a bigger chapter in a much larger book whose author is God. Scriptural genealogies offer to all humans the meta-narrative which ties every single human together in one grand story with God being the narrator. Postmodernism denies the existence of one meta-narrative, but the Bible – and the science of DNA and genetics supports the Bible on this issue – offers that there is in fact a narrative which unites all of humanity and human nature itself. For the believer the Bible is the meta-narrative in which our own story is unfolding while in science it is DNA which provides the thread connecting all humans and all living things.

15 Canaan became the father of Sidon his first-born, and Heth, **16** and the Jeb'usites, the Amorites, the Gir'gashites, **17** the Hivites, the Arkites, the Sinites, **18** the Ar'vadites, the Zem'arites, and the Ha'mathites. Afterward the families of the Canaanites spread abroad. **19** And the territory of the Canaanites extended from Sidon, in the direction of Gerar, as far as Gaza, and in the direction of Sodom, Gomor'rah, Admah, and Zeboi'im, as far as Lasha. **20** These are the sons of Ham, by their families, their languages, their lands, and their nations. **21** To Shem also, the father of all the children of Eber, the elder brother of Japheth, children were born. **22** The sons of Shem: Elam, Asshur, Arpach'shad, Lud, and Aram. **23** The sons of Aram: Uz, Hul, Gether, and Mash. **24** Arpach'shad became the father of Shelah; and Shelah became the father of Eber. **25** To Eber were born two sons: the name of the one was Peleg, for in his days the earth was divided, and his brother's name was Joktan. **26** Joktan became the father of Almo'dad, Sheleph, Hazarma'veth, Jerah, **27** Hador'am, Uzal, Diklah, **28** Obal, Abim'a-el, Sheba, **29** Ophir, Hav'ilah, and Jobab; all these were the sons of Joktan. **30** The territory in which they lived extended from Mesha in the direction of Sephar to the hill country of the east. **31** These are the sons of Shem, by their families, their languages, their lands, and their nations. **32** These are the families of the sons of Noah, according to their genealogies, in their nations; and from these the nations spread abroad on the earth after the flood.

Despite Canaan's being cursed by his grandfather Noah, it is not clear that his fate to be enslaved to his uncles actually happens. Rather the text shows Canaan's descendents will include many of the people who stand in the way of the Jews being able to enter into and conquer the Promised Land and also many of the traditional enemies of the Jewish people. His descendants "spread abroad," suggesting not forced slavery but freedom of movement. These people will prove to be a trial to the Jews as they will be involved in testing their faithfulness to God, and they will also be a curse to the Jews as they serve as stumbling blocks to the Jewish aspiration for keeping God's law and inheriting God's chosen land. In Exodus 3:8, God promises to liberate the Israelites from bondage in Egypt and "to bring them up out of that land to a good and broad land, a land flowing with milk and honey, to the place of the Canaanites, the Hittites, the Amorites, the Per'izzites, the Hivites, and the Jeb'usites." The Promised Land by the time of the Exodus is in the hands of the very people (Canaan and his descendents, see Genesis 10:15-17) whom Noah had cursed to be slaves to Shem and his descendents, the Hebrews. It is an odd turn of history that Shem's descendents become slaves, while Canaan's descendents inhabit the Promised Land. And the Israelites are going to have to fight Canaan's descendents to receive the Promised Land.

Among the descendents of Canaan are those who inhabit Sodom and Gomor'rah – perhaps another clue as to what Ham's sin really was.

Shem is especially recognized as an honorable man in the biblical tradition. According to Sirach, "Shem and Seth were honored among men, and Adam above every living being in the creation" (49:16). In the Gospel according to St. Luke it is through Shem that Christ's ancestry is traced. "...the son of Jacob, the son of Isaac, the son of Abraham, the son of Terah, the son of Nahor, the son of Serug, the son of Re'u, the son of Peleg, the son of Eber, the son of Shelah, the son of Ca-i'nan, the son of Arphax'ad, the son of Shem, the son of Noah, the son of Lamech, the son of Methuselah, the son of Enoch, the son of Jared, the son of Maha'lale-el, the son of Ca-i'nan, the son of Enos, the son of Seth, the son of Adam, the son of God" (Luke 3:34-38). Shem as noted in a previous reflection

God Questions His Creation: Genesis 10

is also commemorated in the Orthodox Sacrament of Holy Matrimony.

Shem's son Eber is the one from whom the Hebrews derive their name. Though the text is offering a brief explanation for the Family Tree of Nations, its focus is clearly on one people – the other people are all purely background, though still within the Creator God's purview. The text is completely monotheistic – there is only one God for all of these many and diverse peoples and languages. There is no mention of other gods or of other religions. Humans may be spreading across the face of the earth and their languages may be multiplying, but they share a common life under the one God.

“...Peleg, for in his days the earth was divided...” While the text in general shows the spread and multiplication of humanity in a natural and peaceful way, Peleg son of Eber from whom the Hebrews derive their name, is associated with a division. What was that division? Some believe this is the beginning of the scriptural treatment of the Jews versus all of the other nations of the world who are the Gentiles.

God had commanded the humans from the beginning to be fruitful and to multiply (Gen 1). We have already seen in the story that one way the humans multiplied was the amount of evil they did, which obviously was not what God had in mind. Now the multiplication of humans continues, but with another twist - not only are there increased numbers of humans but there also is a multiplication of nations and languages with each new descendent seemingly creating his own nation and language. The description of a proto-people spreading out across the earth is consistent with current theories in linguistics about how languages develop, morph and evolve through time. The blessing to multiply turns into further separation, divisiveness, and alienation with ever increasing chances for conflict as each human nation develops its own language and an inability to communicate with the other nations. Humanity is growing but also growing apart.

The genealogies do provide us with the names of the men who were descendents of Adam, Seth and Noah. Despite knowing their names, we actually know very little about most of these people who Scripture wants us to remember. Is

there more to the godly life than simply surviving? Does life have a meaning and purpose? What constitutes a well lived life? These are worthy questions for us to ponder when we read the Genesis genealogies. The only achievement of these men seems to be that they “made a name for themselves” – and their names are recorded in Scripture for all generations of believers to remember. It is not bad to be remembered by future generations. It is perhaps a form of immortality. But in the light of Christ who gives us eternal life many of the things that people want to achieve in life seem of little or no value. Jesus said, “If any man would come after me, let him deny himself and take up his cross and follow me. For whoever would save his life will lose it; and whoever loses his life for my sake and the gospel's will save it. For what does it profit a man, to gain the whole world and forfeit his life? For what can a man give in return for his life?” (Mark 8:34-37) On the two Sundays before Christmas we Orthodox remember the Ancestors of Christ and the Forefathers of Christ. We remember them because they played a role in the history which results in the Virgin's birth and the incarnation of the Word. We are given opportunity not simply to recall historical figures, but to recognize that each person is playing a role in a much bigger narrative. Each person's story is not an end in itself, but part of the mosaic or tapestry which is really the big story which God is telling. We remember these men because in learning about them we are learning the story of all humans and every human and any human and thus the story of ourselves. There is a big story which ties all of humanity together: a meta-narrative which puts each of our lives and our stories into the context of one overarching story, the story of humanity. Thus reading the Genesis account as narrative symbolically encompassing all of humanity is a good challenge to postmodern thinking which denies there is a story which ties all of humanity together or gives humanity direction, purpose or truth. Humanity through history became increasingly fractured and factionalized. We are completely influenced by the extreme and absolute individualism which is the legacy of the Enlightenment and the development of the United States of America. We often feel increasingly isolated from others, alienated from others, and at times in competition with others if not in hostility with others. We live in a world of 6 billion people and yet find it hard to find a thread which ties us all together rather than causing us to bump into

God Questions His Creation: Genesis 10

each other or to conflict with each other or even to repel one another. Genesis is a story which offers to the world a narrative which says, “this is your story”, “this is our story”. We all share in this one story and in this one world, created by one God who wishes for us to live in peace with one another, who wants us to work for a common good rather than for selfish and self centered goals. He wants us to deal in common with our mutual problems. He wishes for us to be civilized, to recognize the difference between good and evil, that there is a difference! He wants us to realize that His view of the world is accessible to us – He has revealed it to us, and we can enter into that revelation if we want to overcome that which separates us from His love and from loving Him and our neighbors. The story of Genesis is that not only are we all really neighbors living in proximity to one another but more importantly we are to be neighbors to one another. “Which of these three, do you think, proved neighbor to the man who fell among the robbers?” He said, ‘The one who showed mercy on him.’ And Jesus said to him, ‘Go and do likewise.’ (Luke 10:36-37). The question “Who is my neighbor?” gets answered by Jesus with “the one to whom you can be neighborly.” But in Christ, we are more than neighbors to whom we can show mercy. For Christ is the New Adam in Whom we all become brothers and sisters. Genesis reveals to us what happens when humans forget that we are all related one to another – ultimately we all are brothers. When we forget this, we treat others as enemies. In Christ we lay claim again to that original blood relationship that we all have with one another. A relationship which was supposed to be love, but which has fallen and been fractured. In Christ we realize the importance of love, forgiveness, service, mercy, repentance, giving, sharing, and caring for one another. When we overcome our selfishness and self-centeredness, we become part of the greater whole of humanity, we become brothers and sisters again, we recognize our shared human nature, and we reclaim our proper relationship with God.

“These are the families of the sons of Noah, according to their genealogies, in their nations; and from these the nations spread abroad on the earth...” In reality the story of those who survive the great deluge becomes the story of a new flood. This time it is a flood of people which covers the face of the earth. The chapter and its genealogies and expanding new nations is

showing how in spite of all of the sin and all of the problems of humanity, humans are in obedience to God filling the earth and attempting to subdue it. The fulfilling of this original command from God to us humans will carry through Western civilization into the European discovery of America and the Westward expansion across North America in the “manifest destiny” vision which drove Americans to fill their new world. When the presidential successors to George Washington began the development of the ill-fated great Potomac canal and waterway, they in fact invoked Genesis claiming America’s westward expansion into the North American continent was the final consummation of God’s command to fill the earth and subdue it. They believed themselves to be the chosen successors to Abraham and all of his biblical descendants.