

## Genesis 10

This is one of those chapters that appears easier skimmed than read. It is, on the surface no more than an interesting genealogy of the descendants of the sons of Noah. Each of the sons, Shem, Ham and Japheth are listed along with their descendants and the geographical locations to which they wandered. The only outlier is the brief mention of Nimrod, who was the first great mighty man and hunter. It would be easy then to dismiss what is contained within this chapter, except, as is often the case, there is more going on in this genealogy than meets the eye.

First, it is an affirmation that the command to Noah to be fruitful, multiply and fill the earth, was being fulfilled by his descendants. They were procreating and traveling. Though the areas mentioned in this chapter only encompass the immediate geographic location of the nation of Israel in the time of Solomon, they are intended to represent all of humanity. This part of the story will however, cause a bit of a problem when we get to the next chapter in which the people of the earth seem to have a single language and live in a single place...but more on that in Chapter 11.

Second, the story reminds us that we are part of a one world family. Even though the peoples move out and become a whole host of nations, it is made clear that they are all related to one another through Noah. This unity will, in a few chapters, form the basis for God's care for all of humanity and not simply one small people group.

Third, the people of Israel are not mentioned, which might appear to be an oversight. After all, when most of the other nations around Israel are named (Canaan, Egypt, Accad, Jebusites, Amorites, etc.) why shouldn't God's people get their own mention? The answer is that Israel will be a unique creation of God. It will be a people called out from among the other peoples. It is not a political entity, but a chosen community.

Fourth, the divisions are human creations and are based on political/geographic choices. This means that God has not "assigned" certain people to certain areas and that race is not the basis for division. While there are divisions by language and location, there is no one group that is understood to be better than another group. They are simply people living in different places, speaking different languages.

**Reflection:** I want us to spend a moment connecting this chapter with the previous one in which Ham is "cursed." "The curse of Ham" as it has been called has a long history within ancient Judaism, Christianity and Islam. It was first used to explain the dominance of Israel over the Canaanites (Ham=Canaan), but was later used to justify the enslavement of others. In Europe in the middle ages, all serfs were thought of as being descended from Ham, and thus deserving of enslavement. Later, this same argument was made about persons from Africa, because they were from Cush (Africa), who was a descendant of Ham. This concept was so prevalent in the United States that the Rev. Dr. Martin Luther King had to speak to it directly as a "blasphemy".

As often happens with scripture, it is twisted by the powerful to oppress the weak. If we take this chapter seriously, such a use of the "curse" cannot be justified. Within this chapter there is no mention of race or class, and thus no basis for discrimination. All human beings are represented as equals in the eye of God, and should, therefore, be treated as such.

Questions:

1. What does it mean to you to be part of God's one-world family?
2. How have you worked to connect with those not of your race or ethnic group?
3. How could you help to create a greater acceptance for "the other" in your church?