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GENESIS: DIVIDED

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¹And God blessed Noah and his sons and said to them, “Be fruitful and multiply and *fill the earth*.”

Genesis 9:1 (ESV)

¹These are the generations of the *sons* of Noah, Shem, Ham, and Japheth. *Sons* were born to them after the flood.

²The sons of Japheth: Gomer, Magog, Madai, Javan, Tubal, Meshech, and Tiras. ³The sons of Gomer: Ashkenaz, Riphath, and Togarmah. ⁴The sons of Javan: Elishah, Tarshish, Kittim, and Dodanim. ⁵From these the coastland peoples spread in their lands, each with his own language, by their clans, in their nations.

⁶The sons of Ham: Cush, Egypt, Put, and Canaan. ⁷The sons of Cush: Seba, Havilah, Sabtah, Raamah, and Sabteca. The sons of Raamah: Sheba and Dedan. ⁸Cush fathered Nimrod; he was the first on earth to be [a mighty man](#). ⁹He was a mighty hunter before the LORD. Therefore it is said, “Like Nimrod a mighty hunter before the LORD.” ¹⁰The beginning of his kingdom was Babel, Erech, Accad, and Calneh, in the land of Shinar. ¹¹From that land he went into Assyria and built Nineveh, Rehoboth-Ir, Calah, and ¹²Resen between Nineveh and Calah; that is the great city. ¹³Egypt fathered Ludim, Anamim, Lehabim, Naphtuhim, ¹⁴Pathrusim, Casluhim (from whom the Philistines came), and Caphtorim. ¹⁵Canaan fathered Sidon his firstborn and Heth, ¹⁶and the Jebusites, the Amorites, the Girgashites, ¹⁷the Hivites, the Arkites, the Sinites, ¹⁸the Arvadites, the Zemarites, and the Hamathites. Afterward the clans of the Canaanites dispersed. ¹⁹And the territory of the Canaanites extended from Sidon in the direction of Gerar as far as Gaza, and in the direction of Sodom, Gomorrah, Admah, and Zeboiim, as far as Lasha. ²⁰These are the sons of Ham, by their clans, their languages, their lands, and their nations.

²¹To Shem also, the father of all the children of Eber, the elder brother of Japheth, children were born. ²²The sons of Shem: Elam, Asshur, Arpachshad, Lud, and Aram. ²³The sons of Aram: Uz, Hul, Gether, and Mash. ²⁴Arpachshad fathered Shelah; and Shelah fathered Eber. ²⁵To 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. ²⁶Joktan fathered Almodad, Sheleph, Hazarmaveth, Jerah, ²⁷Hadoram, Uzal, Diklah, ²⁸Obal, Abimael, Sheba, ²⁹Ophir, Havilah, and Jobab; all these were the sons of Joktan. ³⁰The territory in which they lived extended from Mesha in the direction of Sephar to the hill country of the east. ³¹These are the sons of Shem, by their clans, their languages, their lands, and their nations.

³²These are the *clans* 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.

Genesis 10:1–32 (ESV)

The list of the sons of Shem, Ham, and Japheth contains seventy names, and we cannot believe for a moment that this is accidental. Seventy stands for totality and completion. Note the seventy descendants of Jacob (Ex. 1:5), the seventy elders of Israel (24:1), the seventy disciples sent out (Luke 10:1–16); outside the Bible, seventy sons of the Canaanite goddess Asherah and seventy members of the Sanhedrin.¹

This group of seventy does not reflect the perspective of Noah's descendants in the third or fourth generation; rather, it is Israel's perspective at the time of the author, Moses. Note that there is no discussion of anyone outside the known world of the ancient Near East in the middle of the second millennium. The text only seeks to account for the groups the Israelites were aware of and does not hint at a world beyond the ancient Near East. In other words, the author has not attempted to provide a comprehensive list of all people(s) descended from the sons of Noah. Instead, he has addressed how all the known peoples and nations of his day are related to the sons of Noah²

Yet at the same time, we cannot help but notice that the list certainly is incomplete in its presentation of the descendants of Noah and his sons. The author penetrated selectively into various lines in order to achieve his final number. We therefore must conclude that this list of seventy is representative of the totality³

Additionally, there are two expansions, one regarding Nimrod (10:8–12), who is only linked loosely to Cush, the other regarding the territory of the Canaanites (10:19)⁴

FROM FAMILY TO NATIONS (GENESIS 10:1, 32)

¹Now the whole earth had one language and the same words.

²And as people migrated from the east, they found a plain in the land of Shinar and settled there.

³And they said to one another, “Come, let us make bricks, and burn them thoroughly.” And they had brick for stone, and bitumen for mortar.

⁴Then they said, “Come, let us build ourselves a city and a tower with its top in the heavens, and let us *make a name for ourselves*, lest we be dispersed over the face of the whole earth.”

⁵And the LORD came down to see the city and the tower, which the children of man had built.

⁶And the LORD said, “Behold, they are *one people*, and they have all one language, and this is only the beginning of what they will do. And nothing that they propose to do will now be impossible for them.

⁷Come, *let us go down* and there confuse their language, so that they may not understand one another’s speech.”

⁸*So the LORD* dispersed them from there over the face of all the earth, and they left off building the city.

⁹Therefore its name was called Babel, because there the LORD confused the language of all the earth. And from there the LORD dispersed them over the face of all the earth.

Genesis 11:1–9 (ESV)

⁴Then they said, “Come, let us build ourselves a city and *a tower with its top in the heavens*, and let us *make a name for ourselves, lest we be dispersed* over the face of the whole earth.”

Genesis 11:4 (ESV)

FIRST, LEST WE’RE DISPERSED: THIS IS WILFULL REBELLION AGAINST THE DIVINE MANDATE TO BE FRUITFUL AND MULTIPLY AND SPREAD.

SECOND, TOWER: As we noted in an earlier chapter, gods were perceived to live on mountains. The tower of Babel is regarded by all scholars as one of Mesopotamia’s famous man-made sacred mountains—a ziggurat. Ziggurats were divine abodes, places where Mesopotamians believed heaven and earth intersected. The nature of this structure makes evident the purpose in building it—to bring the divine down to earth.

THIRD, MAKE A NAME: The biblical writer wastes no time in linking this act to the earlier divine transgression of Genesis 6:1–4. That passage sought to portray the giant quasi-divine Babylonian culture heroes (the apkallus) who survived the flood as “men of renown” or, more literally, “men of the name [shem].” Those who built the tower of Babel wanted to do so to “make a name [shem]” for themselves. The building of the tower of Babel meant perpetuating Babylonian religious knowledge and substituting the rule of Babel’s gods for rule by Yahweh.⁵

⁴The Nephilim were on the earth in those days, and also afterward, when the sons of God came in to the daughters of man and they bore children to them. These were the mighty men (gibborim) who were of old, the men of renown.

[Genesis 6:4 \(ESV\)](#)

⁸Cush fathered Nimrod; he was the first on earth to be a mighty man (gibbor).

[Genesis 10:8 \(ESV\)](#)

Nimrod (whose name most likely means “rebellion”) is called a *gibbor*. Nimrod is cast as the progenitor of the civilizations of Assyria and Babylon (Gen 10:6–12). Once again, as with Genesis 6, the Mesopotamian context is transparent. Assyria and Babylon are the two civilizations that will later destroy the dream of the earthly kingdom of God in Israel, dismantling, respectively, the northern kingdom (Israel) and southern kingdom (Judah).⁶

⁶And the LORD said, “Behold, they are *one people*, and they have all one language, and this is only the beginning of what they will do. And nothing that they propose to do will now be impossible for them.

⁷Come, *let us go down* and there confuse their language, so that they may not understand one another’s speech.”

⁸*So the LORD* dispersed them from there over the face of all the earth, and they left off building the city.

⁹Therefore its name was called Babel, because there the LORD confused the language of all the earth. And from there the LORD dispersed them over the face of all the earth.

[Genesis 11:6–9 \(ESV\)](#)

FROM NATIONS TO FAMILY (ACTS 2:1-11)

11 Therefore remember that at one time you Gentiles in the flesh, called “the uncircumcision” by what is called the circumcision, which is made in the flesh by hands— 12 remember that you were at that time separated from Christ, alienated from the commonwealth of Israel and strangers to the covenants of promise, having no hope and without God in the world. 13 But now in Christ Jesus you who once were far off have been brought near by the blood of Christ. 14 For he himself is our peace, who has made us both one and has broken down in his flesh the dividing wall of hostility 15 by abolishing the law of commandments expressed in ordinances, that he might create in himself one new man in place of the two, so making peace, 16 and might reconcile us both to God in one body through the cross, thereby killing the hostility. 17 And he came and preached peace to you who were far off and peace to those who were near. 18 For through him we both have access in one Spirit to the Father. 19 So then you are no longer strangers and aliens,[d] but you are fellow citizens with the saints and members of the household of God,

Ephesians 2:11-19 (ESV)

¹ Walton, J. H. (2001). *Genesis*. Grand Rapids, MI: Zondervan.

² Walton, J. H. (2009). *Zondervan Illustrated Bible Backgrounds Commentary (Old Testament): Genesis, Exodus, Leviticus, Numbers, Deuteronomy* (Vol. 1, p. 56). Grand Rapids, MI: Zondervan.

³ Walton, J. H. (2001). *Genesis* (p. 367). Grand Rapids, MI: Zondervan.

⁴ Walton, J. H. (2001). *Genesis* (p. 367). Grand Rapids, MI: Zondervan.

⁵ Heiser, M. S. (2015). *The Unseen Realm: Recovering the Supernatural Worldview of the Bible* (First Edition, pp. 114–115). Bellingham, WA: Lexham Press.

⁶ Heiser, M. S. (2015). *The Unseen Realm: Recovering the Supernatural Worldview of the Bible* (First Edition, p. 111). Bellingham, WA: Lexham Press.