

READ

Genesis 10

REFLECT

In only 10 chapters of Genesis readers are already met with their third litany of the names of the offspring of important people – and it won't be the last, not by a long shot. While it makes for a fairly tedious read, it also highlights just how important family was for ancient peoples. In this case, it was even more – it established the familial connection to all the people with whom Israel would later interact. Seventy names are mentioned, which is an important number, but more than that, it was to account for the entirety of the world known to Genesis' authors. Later, people would try to divide the whole world into three according to the sons of Noah – Ham being Africa and the Arabian Peninsula, Japheth being Europe, and Shem being Asia. It was a way to divide humanity from a perception of value and use the story of Noah as the “evidence” for it. Not only was that wrong, as it ignored the locations of many of the names on the list to fit an ideological driven narrative rather than the written word, it entirely missed the point of the list. This list was never meant to be a wedge to divide people in an “us” vs “them,” it was meant to show how Noah's family fulfilled God's command to “be fertile, multiply, and fill the earth” (Genesis 9:1). Chapter 10 of Genesis shows how each generation of son after Noah moved to a new place, established a family and community, and the earth once again began to fill.

Many of the people and places in the list are important. Some are important because they were enemies of Israel, others important because they were places important people from Israel interacted with regularly. Babel, from whence the kingdom of Babylon would rise, is mentioned, as are Egypt and Cush (Ethiopia), other great ancient empires. Nineveh, a one-time capital of the Assyrian Empire and setting for Jonah's prophetic work, is also mentioned. In all these occasions, the point is to show the people of God that all people, regardless of their nation or creed, belong to the same human family. While the names and places mean very little for us today because of time and the rise and fall of empires, they meant a great deal to our forefathers and

mothers in faith. It assured them that all of humanity had been claimed by God and God would be working out goodness for all.

REACT

- Do any names or places stand out from this list for any reason? What about them makes them important for you?
- For some, the thought that all humanity began with one family (Noah's) seems farfetched. How does it sit with you? What are your questions about the movement of people and the building of civilizations? Does Genesis help or hurt your understanding of them?
- Ancient peoples had a very different way of writing history than we do today, something that is frequently misunderstood by the average person. Ancient peoples didn't much care for specificity when they wrote their histories, for example, preferring to capture overarching emotions or feelings instead. How can you begin to bridge that divide so that the words of scripture, and the truth that dwells within, might be removed as places of doubt or uncertainty?

RESPOND

Family and Place: We're all from somewhere, and most of us haven't lived in the same place for generations. What do you know of your own family's movement with each generation? Where did your parents grow up, and their parents? Do relatives whose parents moved to another place than your own have different customs or traditions? Take time this week to examine the "where" of your family and the differences that have arisen because of place. Think of how much you love those relatives who eat a different kind of bar-b-que and slaw (or whatever the differences are) and how you still recognize them as family despite the differences. Then reflect on our human family – God's family – and, understanding that differences have also arisen because of time and place, practice loving them despite the differences that exist, just like you love your own relatives. Practice seeing the neighbor who is from Eastern Europe, or the Afghan refugee you see on the news, or whomever, not as someone who is different, but part of your family, the family that God saved and established a new creation through. It's reason to celebrate!