

# **WHERE DID THE NATIONS COME FROM?**

**By Mike Burnham**

God is the Author of the nations, the Governor of their rise and fall and the Lord of their destiny, Acts 17:19-26. This is God's world, not man's, and while men are, up to a point, able to choose their actions, they are not able to choose the results of those actions, Luke 12:16-21.

## **THE BEGINNING**

With the flood came another new beginning, a wiping out of that which was spoiled and impossible of restoration. A beginning with a godly family which, in the midst of universal corruption, had found faith and grace in God's sight and had shown a determination to do His will, Gen. 6:8. Noah became the father of the entire human race. His three sons, Japheth, Ham, and Shem, were born before the flood, and were to be the forefathers of mankind born after the flood, Gen. 9:18-19.

To Noah and his family was given the right to exercise the prerogative of human government, the right of man to rule his fellow man. The sword of divine retribution was placed in the hand of man in an attempt to control the natural lawlessness of the human heart, Gen. 9:4-6.

## **SIN ENTERED**

In Genesis 9:20-21 we read the tragic story of Noah's drunkenness and the sudden unveiling of Ham's carnality and rebellious heart shows that

despite the cleansing judgment of the flood, man was still a sinner. The behavior of Shem and Japheth as well as that of Ham, provides a clue to their characters and the occasion for Noah's prophecy. This is the first time wine is mentioned in the Bible in connection with the drunkenness and shame of Noah. After all he had been through, he let down his guard. What harm could there be in a little relaxation and a little provision for the comforts of the flesh? Rom. 13:14.

Verses 22-23....As Ham entered the tent he was probably surprised to see his father lying there, naked and drunk. He did more than just see him. The word "saw" in this context implies "gazed at", evidently with satisfaction. Maybe he was thinking that his brothers would share his satisfaction at seeing their father's shame and weakness went to tell them. The word "told" in other scriptures means "to show". This might suggest that he was very graphic in his telling.

Verses 24-27....Here we have a prophecy. As the prophecy of Gen. 3:15-19 was given as a result of the fall of Adam, this prophecy was given as a result of the fall of Noah. Notice the parallel:

1. Both Adam and Noah were commanded to "fill the earth and exercise control over it, 1:28; 9:1-2.
2. Each of them is actually the ancestor of all men in the present world.
3. Each sinned by partaking of a fruit---Noah the fruit of the vine, and Adam the fruit of the tree of the knowledge of good and evil, 3:6; 9:20-21.
4. As a result of their sin, each became naked and a covering was provided by someone else, 3:7,21; 9:22-23.

5. The prophecy resulted in a curse.

Noah's prophetic words were directed first toward Ham (in the person of his son Canaan) who, along with his older brothers, Cush, Mizraim and Phut, inherited the carnal and materialistic nature of his father Ham. Canaan may have been mentioned to stress that the terms of the prophecy extended to all Ham's sons, even the youngest.

A "servant of servants" cannot mean "a slave of slaves", because such a situation has never occurred among any of the descendants of Ham's four sons, including Canaan. The descendants of Ham include the Sumerians, the Egyptians, the Ethiopians, and other great nations of the past.

In verses 26-27, Noah predicted that Canaan would be both servant to Shem and servant to Japheth. In other words, servant to all other nations. This unique and worldwide service is probably in part what is meant by "servant of servants."

### **MAN, GOD'S STEWARD**

Man in general is God's steward over the physical world as well as its living creatures. The ground was already cursed and man was from then on to develop and utilize its resources for the sustenance of life, "in the sweat of his face." Man still had the responsibility of subduing and exercising dominion over the earth and its creatures, Psalms 8:6-8. This means that he must seek to understand his dominion. This would require science and philosophy.

Man was also to teach about the Lord, preserving and transmitting the promises of God. So man had three types of duties to perform as God's steward over the earth: Physical, intellectual, and spiritual. These three duties correspond to the nature of man, body, soul, and spirit, 1 Thess. 5:23.

Some people are motivated by physical or materialistic considerations, some by intellectual, and some by spiritual. The same is true of nations. Russia, for instance, is not a religious nation nor could it be called a philosophical or scientific nation. Materialistic or physical would more accurately describe it.

Noah recognized these three characteristics in his sons, who were in effect the fathers of all modern nations. Shem was mainly motivated by spiritual considerations, Japheth by intellectual, and Ham by physical. And the same would be true of the nations descending from them in a very general way. Each was regarded as God's servants, so Ham and his descendants were to serve Shem and Japheth and their descendants who were also servants. What exactly Ham's curse was I don't know. I've read many opinions, but they all seem pretty weak. But his primary relationship seems to be and has been to the cursed ground and carnal and materialistic matters.

In verse 26, Noah uses the word Jehovah (LORD) in reference to Shem. This implies that Shem will have or had a special relationship with God. We later see this relationship fulfilled specifically in the nation Israel.

In verse 27 the word "enlarge" is used all other places in scripture to refer to the mind and evidently refers to mental enlargement. The

descendants of Japheth would be intellectually curious, explorers in the world of thought.