

Article

The Genesis of Jewish Genealogy

Aaron Demsky

Department of Jewish History, Bar-Ilan University, Ramat-Gan 5290002, Israel; aaron.demsky@biu.ac.il

Abstract: This paper examines the structure, message, and content of biblical genealogies in light of literary analysis and social anthropology. In particular, the focus is on the so-called “Table of Nations” in Genesis 10. My basic assumption is that most biblical genealogies are a literary genre employing various devices that carry a message using symbolic numbers, chiasmic structure, and anticipation. These lists interact and supplement the narrative, sometimes as a foil to the story line. They are inserted at relevant points of change in the story of mankind from Adam and Eve to Joseph and his brothers. I even propose that these insertions are the earliest form of dividing the book of Genesis into installments, a precursor to weekly Torah readings and to the later division into chapters as in the printed text. The underlying message of this chapter is the value concept of the brotherhood of mankind stemming from one father—Noah. This innovative idea of universal kinship breaks with the common pagan view prevalent in antiquity that man’s place is to serve the gods and to have little or no personal identity. Note that the great urban cultures of ancient Egypt and Mesopotamia have left us no real records of family lineage other than the long king lists that reflect dynastic power. No doubt the importance of oral and written lineage stems from a tribal culture like that of the ancient Hebrews and their kindred. This overriding view even shaped the Nimrud pericope, describing his founding the urban centers of Babylon and Assyria. Genealogy became the natural medium expressing this message of universal kinship. Basic to understanding biblical genealogies is discerning two patterns of kinship, one, linear, stretching up to ten generations, and two, segmented genealogies, noting an eponymous “father” and his segmented offspring or wives. Our understanding of these structures in the Bible is shaped by the research of social anthropologists who studied oral genealogy among analphabetic tribes in Africa and the Middle East. I apply these observations and methodology in a detailed commentary on the Table of Nations.

Keywords: biblical genealogy; book of Genesis; Table of Nations



Citation: Demsky, Aaron. 2023. The Genesis of Jewish Genealogy. *Genealogy* 7: 91. <https://doi.org/10.3390/genealogy7040091>

Received: 25 October 2023
Revised: 14 November 2023
Accepted: 15 November 2023
Published: 21 November 2023



Copyright: © 2023 by the author. Licensee MDPI, Basel, Switzerland. This article is an open access article distributed under the terms and conditions of the Creative Commons Attribution (CC BY) license (<https://creativecommons.org/licenses/by/4.0/>).

1. Introduction

For over 2000 years, the central focus of the Sabbath service in most synagogues—the Jewish place of prayer—is the weekly Torah reading of the Five Books of Moses. The first book is Genesis, where we find the famous narratives of Adam and Eve in the Garden of Eden and the stories of their descendants from Noah down to Joseph and his brothers. While these stories have shaped western literature, less attention has been given to the interspersed genealogies throughout the book, which are integral to the narrative. They are more than just lists of “begats”, but rather a literary genre in their own right. In fact, most of the genealogies serve an additional editorial purpose of dividing the book into periodic instalments, a prelude to dividing the book into *sidrot* and *parshiot*, reflecting the Jewish tradition of public readings, and the later division of the book into chapters that became the norm with the advent of printing. For instance, Genesis 10 is a unique extended list of genealogies that has been called the “Table of Nations”, purporting to name the seventy progeny of Noah and his three sons. It serves to mark the end of the prediluvian period and the beginning of the history of mankind.

Similarly, the short genealogy of Nahor in Gen 22: 20–24 divides the early history of the Patriarch Abraham and his son Isaac from the latter’s marriage to Rebecca and their

family story. Abraham's death is followed by the genealogies of his other descendants, i.e., Ishmael and the sons of Keturah (Gen 25). Later on, Gen 36 presents five lists of the children of Esau, providing a long pause before the story of Joseph. These genealogies are brief digressions noting related families in the overall dynamic flow of the narrative leading up to the story of the Children of Israel.

In this paper we will look at the form, message, and structure of biblical genealogies,¹ particularly the Table of Nations,² in light of literary analysis and social anthropological methods (Fortes 1949; Evans-Pritchard 1951; Peters 1960, pp. 29–53). In the past fifty-plus years, this method has been applied to biblical genealogies (Johnson 1969; Demsky 1971, 2016; Malamet 1973; Wilson 1977, pp. 18–55; 1984; Bendor 1996; Levin 2001, 2012).

The Table of Nations (Genesis 10) stands out as a unique expression of ancient Israel's understanding of the known world and the interrelationship of its inhabitants. More than an encyclopedic list of contemporary peoples, it is the capstone of the pre-Patriarchal chapters (Genesis 1–11), succinctly summarizing, in genealogical form, the innovative universalistic message of the Bible. It contrasts sharply with the picture of mankind found in the pagan world as reflected in such works as the *Enuma Elish* (the Babylonian Creation epic) or Hesiod's *Theogony*, where different gods manifested in Nature create man in anonymous droves, relegating him to a secondary, servile position while the great heroes are conceived individually or through divine insemination in the unfolding of pagan myth.

In the biblical narrative, mankind is descended from a common father, first Adam and later Noah. Monogenesis implies the brotherhood of man, a repeated motif finding its universalistic expression in these stories. Its particularistic Israelite counterpart is found in the Prophets: "Look back to Abraham your father and Sarah who brought you forth. For he was only one when I called him, But I blessed him and made him many" (Isaiah 51:2); "Have we not one father [Jacob/Israel]? Did not one God create us? Why do we break faith with one another, profaning the covenant of our fathers?" (Malachi 2:10).

The underlying message of the Table is the brotherhood of man descending from the three sons of Noah who survived the Flood. Initially, no one nation or race is preferred over another, but each is presented as objectively as possible. The idea of the family of nations is expressed implicitly in the choice of the medium of genealogy. While the geographical areas of the descendants of the three brothers are broadly delineated,³ there is, however, some apparent territorial overlapping, which no doubt reflects an interrelationship and dependence of one nation upon another over time. This condition is expressed poetically:

"May God enlarge Japeth,
And let him dwell in the tents of Shem;
And let Canaan be a slave to them". (Genesis 9:27)

One may even find in the typological number of seventy names, including the three sons of Noah and their sixty-seven descendants, a literary device expressing the totality of mankind. This harmonious number, though not explicit, is certainly significant as a summation of primeval history as it is in summing up the patriarchal period in Genesis 46:27. The implied parallel between the macrocosmos (nations of the world) and the microcosm (the tribes of Israel) has not been lost (see Genesis 4:27; Exodus 1:5; Deuteronomy 10:22; 32:8). It is obvious, even from the Table (see vs. 5, 20, 31, 32), that there was no attempt to present a complete encyclopedic list of all the known nations. Israel as well as other related peoples (Nahor, Lot, Ishmael, Keturah, and Esau) are accounted for in genealogies in the later chapters of the book of Genesis. The enumeration of seventy nations in this chapter is therefore a literary device expressing an inclusive number for all of mankind (compare Judges 8:30; 12:14; II Kings 10:11).⁴ As Nahum Sarna (1989, p. 69) cogently summed up: "The Table [is] a document thus far unparalleled in the ancient world. This strangely perplexing miscellany of peoples and tribes and places is no mere academic or scholastic exercise. It affirms first of all, the common origin and absolute unity of humankind after the Flood; then it tacitly, but effectively, asserts that the varied

instrumentalities of human divisiveness are all secondary to the essential unity of the international community, which truly constitutes a family of man.”

2. The Form

There are two basic types of biblical genealogies recording kinship patterns. One is linear, which is dynamic and diachronic, presenting one line of descent to the tenth generation, as in Genesis 4:17–26; 5:3–32; 11:10–26. Social anthropologists have termed this cultural feature “structural depth”.⁵ It is also a literary means of indicating a passage of time. The second type of biblical genealogy is segmented, presenting from two to twelve segments, i.e., sons, of the founding “father” and from two to five “generations” in depth,⁶ something like a multi-generational family picture that is static or synchronic. In polygamous tribal lineages, these segments (or branches) are named for the different matriarchs or, alternatively, for the many sons of the eponymous father. This horizontal line has been termed by anthropologists “spatial depth”, reflecting the settlement pattern of the tribal territory.

Sometimes, short linear genealogies are in ascending order: C, son of B, son of A, and at other times in descending order: A, father of B, father of C. These lists serve another literary purpose, which is to introduce the central hero of the ensuing story. For instance, Samuel’s lineage: “There was a man from Ramathaim of the Zuphites, in the hill country of Ephraim, whose name was Elkanah son of Jeroham son of Elihu son of Tohu son of Zuph, an Ephramite. He had two wives one named Hannah and the other Peninnah: Peninnah had children, but Hannah was childless” (I Samuel 1, 1–2). Another is that of Saul: “There was a man of Benjamin whose name was Kish son of Abiel son of Zeror son of Bechorath son of Aphiah, a Benjaminite, a man of substance” (I Sam 9, 1). And then David: “David was the son of a certain Ephratite of Bethlehem in Judah whose name was Jesse” (Ibid. 17, 12). And in the later books—Mordecai: “A Jew by the name of Mordecai son of Jair son of Shimei son of Kish, a Benjaminite” (Esther 2, 5). A much longer genealogy is that of Ezra the Scribe (Ezra 7, 1–5). Two different extended lineages of Jesus are found in Matthew 1:1–17 and Luke 3: 23–38 (Johnson 1969).

One of the most interesting examples of this type of genealogy is that of Moses and particularly Aaron, which interrupts the narrative in Exodus 6, 13–28. This aside is enclosed by what is called a “resumptive repetition” or *Wiederaufnahm*, i.e., restating verses 13 and 28, indicating that the lineage is an inserted “sidebar”.

Moreover, this genealogy seems to be a composite of segmented types. It begins with the standard sons of Jacob but stops at Levi, the relevant eponym. At this point, it becomes a short, segmented genealogy listing his three sons and their progeny along with their life spans. Notably, some of their wives and descendants are mentioned who will appear in later narrative:

The following are the heads of their respective clans.

The sons of Reuben, Israel’s first born: Enoch and Pallu, Hezron and Carmi; these are the families of Reuben.

The sons of Simeon: Jemuel, Jamin, Ohad, Jahin, Zohar, and Saul’ the son of a Canaanite woman; those are the families of Simeon.

These are names of Levi’s sons by their lineage: Gershon., Kohath and Merari; and Levi’s life was 137 years.

The sons of Gershon: Libni and Shimei by their families.

The sons of **Kohath**: **Amran**, Izhar, Hebron and Uzziel; and the span of Kohath’s life was 133 years.

The sons of Merari: Mahli and Mushi. These are the families of the Levites by their lineage.

Amran took to wife his father’s sister **Jochebed**, and she bore him **Aaron** and **Moses**; and the span of Amran’s life was 137 years.

The sons of Izhar: Korah, Nepheg and Zichri.

The sons of Uzziel: Mishael, Elzaphan and Sithri.

Aaron took to wife Elisheba, daughter of Amminadab and sister of Nahshon, and she bore him Nadab and Abihu, Eleazar and Ithamar.

The sons of Korah: Assir, Elkanah and Abiasaph. Those are the families of the Korahites.

And **Aaron's son Eleazar** took to wife one of Putiel's daughters, and she bore him **Phineas**.

Those are the heads of the fathers' houses of the Levites by their families.

In essence, the more complex segmented genealogies, especially in their earlier oral form, were a means of identifying the status of the individual among his tribesmen, vis-a-vis his rights of inheritance (Numbers 36, 6; Judges 11, 1–2), permitted marriages, and responsibilities to redeem those in need (Ruth 3, 12; 4, 4). One had to know his paternal cousins (Arabic: *ibn 'am*) as well as his maternal relatives (Arab. *ibn ḥal*).

There are other mechanisms that shape tribal genealogy, allowing it to expand and contract in light of historic and social developments. One is “structural amnesia” or “telescoping”, i.e., dropping names or skipping a generation or two, especially in the middle of a linear genealogy, either because of a repetition of a series of the same names or because a certain member dies young, leaving his offspring to be raised by the grandfather. Another common feature, especially in segmented genealogies, that allows the family tree to grow and even accept new members is called “fluidity.” Fluidity in a living society is commonly found in oral genealogies. It indicates the grafting of a segment from another clan or tribe. This might be due to intermarriage, i.e., a “connubium”, sometimes recognized as giving equal status to a distaff member of the family. Alternately, adopting a foreign clan may be due to migration or conquest of an intruding family. When these oral genealogies are written down, as in the Bible, they are frozen in time. Similar or identical segments might therefore be found in more than one tribal genealogy, which has led literalist commentators to view the two as “contradictory genealogies which are in fact accurate records of the lineage functioning in particular contexts” (Wilson 1984, p. 59; Levin 2001; but see Sarna 1989, p. 68).

2.1. Classification

As we will see below, the Table of Nations, with a few exceptions, is a collection of segmented genealogies that has many of the above-mentioned literary and social characteristics. In line with the narrative, the segments have been ordered according to the three sons of Noah: Japheth, Ham, and Shem, inverting their ages (Genesis 5:32; 9:18; 10:1). This present order was editorial, to give an implicit direction of the nations of the known world from the geographically furthest to the closest to ancient Israel, the subject of the book.

The grouping of the nations in this chapter follows a threefold empirical criterion: ethnic kinship, geographic continuity, and linguistic affinity (vss. 5, 20, 31). Applying empirical criteria to define the nations of the world in antiquity is innovative. Though primitive and not always exact, it is the basis of scientific thinking.⁷ It is no wonder that modern linguists in the nineteenth century adopted two of its categories, i.e., Semitic and Hamitic languages, from this chapter.

While there was some cognizance of linguistic families in the biblical period, as might be inferred from the terms “the language of Canaan” (Isaiah 19:18), a passage that indicates that language did cross the ethnic divisions is presented in the Table. Compare the Chaldean language (Daniel 1:4) or in general (Isaiah 66:18, Zachariah 8:23) or even observable dialectic differences (Deuteronomy 3:9; Judges 12:6; Nehemiah 13:24). Under the multi-national Neo-Assyrian, Neo-Babylonian, and Persian empires, many languages could be heard (Esther 1:22; 3:12; 8:9). Certainly, the fall of the Tower of Babel (Genesis 11:1–9) symbolizes linguistic diversity as the natural order (see Deuteronomy 28:49; Jer. 5 15; and II Kings 18:26) Therefore, this criterion does not seem to have been a real factor in Genesis 10, as can be seen in the grouping of such diverse linguistic peoples as the Elamites, the Assyrians, and the Lydians as Semites.

2.2. Terminology

In order to understand the chapter, something must be said about the particular terminology of genealogies, specifically about the familial terms *ab* “father” and *ben* “son” and the verb *yld* “to beget”. Furthermore, an examination of the names shows that various nominal forms are interspersed in the chapter, sometimes in the same genealogy, including personal names (e.g., Nimrod), place names (e.g., Mizraim, Elishah, Tarshish, Sidon), national or tribal names in the plural (e.g., Kittim, Dodanim, Kasluhim, Caphtorim), as well as gentilic adjectives (e.g., Amorites, Arkites). Accordingly, Cassuto (1959, pp. 117–53) emphasized that the above kinship terms cannot be taken literally, but rather metaphorically, as is the case in many genealogies found in the book of Chronicles (e.g., Salma the father of Bethlehem, I Chronicles 2:51). “Father” expresses the eponymous founder or hero to which peoples or tribes relate themselves. Similarly, “sons” should not be taken literally; the term “sons” is an expression of an intrinsic connection or union of comparatively equal groups that may have been based on a variety of ethnic, geographic, political, or social factors.

The root *yld* “to give birth” is used to express kinship, as in the forms *toledoth*, i.e., “genealogical or historic accounts” (Genesis 6:9; 10:1; 11:10) and *hityaled* “registered” (Numbers 1:18). The latter forms are replaced by *ktav hamityahasim* (genealogical tree) and *hityahhes* (to relate in kinship) in the Second Temple period. Other terms found in Genesis 10 that were taken from the genetic relationships of the family unit are *bekhor* “first born” (vs 15) and the verb *ys’* (vss 11, 14) meaning “progeny”, as in *se’esa’* (Isaiah 61:10). The Table of Nations is therefore a sophisticated presentation in genealogical form of the relationship of most of the then-known peoples of the ancient Near East.

3. Family and Territory

Essentially, there are two concurrent principles of identification in the Bible: family and territory (village, city, or country) (see I Samuel 1:1; Ruth 1:2; 4:10; I Chronicles 2–8 passim) and both are present in Genesis 10. In addition to an ethnic relationship implied in the genealogies, additional geographic details are given regarding Nimrod’s realm (vss. 10–12), the borders of the land of Canaan (vs. 19), and the dwelling places of Joktan (vs 30). These geographic asides are missing in the parallel account in I Chronicles 1. The first one bears on the overall history of urban civilization, understood to have begun in Mesopotamia, while the second one reflects interest in the land of Canaan for the anticipated history of Israel.

On the other hand, the grouping of Canaan with the Hamites or the Philistines with the Egyptians or the Elamites with the Semites is probably indicative of the implicit criteria of political association and cultural influence. For a good part of the second half of the second millennium, the land of Canaan fell under the suzerainty of Egypt. Furthermore, the Philistines, one of the Sea Peoples, maintained mercantile connections with Egypt and, for a time, acted in conjunction with Egyptian imperialistic diplomacy. Gaza, one of their centers, was formally the capital of the Egyptian Province of *pa-Kn’n*, i.e., Canaan. The Elamites shared a cuneiform culture with Mesopotamia and from the beginning of history was considered part of the Babylonian and Assyrian sphere of influence.

As mentioned above, one of the difficulties of biblical genealogy is the appearance of certain nations in more than one genealogy. A case in point is the repetition of the South Arabian Sheba and Dedan among the sons of Kush (10: 7) and again as the offspring of Keturah (Genesis 25:3), or Sheba, a third time, as a son of Joktan (Genesis 10:28). Similarly, Aram appears in the Table as the fourth son of Shem (10:22), whereas in the genealogy of Nahor he is a grandson, the son of Kemuel (Genesis 22:21). Furthermore, Uz appears as Aram’s oldest son in Genesis 10:23 and as Nahor’s first-born in Genesis 22:21. Again, Ludim is related to Egypt (10:13), whereas Lud is a son of Shem (10:21), if indeed they are identical. These supposed contradictions are generally attributed to different literary sources; however, they are more likely to be identified as a fundamental aspect of tribal genealogies, i.e., fluidity, a feature of oral genealogies that allows for repetition of the same segments grafted onto different, though related, genealogies. These joins reflect new

political and social unions formed over a period of time. The Table of Nations, with its world-wide subdivisions and universal message, was composed at the time of the writing of the book of Genesis, whereas the localized, familial lists of Nahor and Keturah present a more historical older tradition.

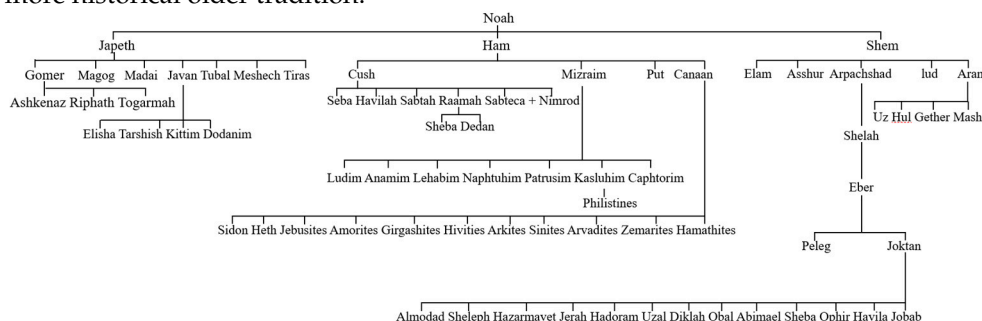


TABLE of NATIONS (Gen 10)

4. The Individual Units

4.1. Japheth

The genealogy of Japheth is made up of two units of seven nations. The name Japheth may reflect the name Iapetos, the son of Uranus (Sky) and Gea (Earth), one of the Titans of Greek mythology. The sons of Japheth number a group of nations located from the northeast of the Fertile Crescent (Madai) to the Greek islands (Javan = Ionia) in the west, including peoples who resided in Anatolia.

Gomer, according to most scholars, is identified with the Assyrian Gimirrai, the Cimmerians in classical sources. They were an Indo-European people who resided north of the Black Sea and who by the end of the eighth century BCE relocated to Asia Minor. In Ezekiel 38:6, Gomer is mentioned in league with Gog king of Magog. Gomer's progeny is Ashkenaz, which has been identified with the Assyrian Ashquza, i.e., the Scythians. Jeremiah describes how they joined with Ararat, the Mannaens, and the Medes in an attack on the Neo-Babylonian empire (51:27–28). According to Herodotus, they even advanced on Egypt. From the Greek name Scythopolis, we can infer that some had settled in Beth Shean.

Riphath is unknown. In the parallel version in I Chronicles 1:6 the name is written Diphath. Togarmah, however, is documented in the fourteenth century BCE Hittite sources, where it is called Tegarama, as well as in Assyrian sources as Til-Garimum, which fell before Sargon II and Sennacherib. It was located north of Harran and Carchemish on the Euphrates River. Ezekiel identified it as a supplier of horses and mules in the Tyrian mercantile empire (Ezekiel 27:14; 38:6). The expanded name Beth-Togarma, as used by Ezekiel, may indicate that this kingdom fell under Aramean influence, as did other north Syrian neo-Hittite peoples.

The second son of Japheth is Magog. This is the land of Gog (Ezekiel 38:2; 39:6), who is identified by most scholars with Gyges of Lydia in western Asia Minor. According to Herodotus (Bk. 1, 8–14), he founded the local dynasty in the early seventh century BCE.

Madai refers to the Medes, an Indo-Iranian people who dwelt to the east of Mesopotamia. During the seventh century BCE, they reached the height of their political power and contributed to the fall of the Neo-Assyrian empire and later, in the sixth century, to the weakening of the Neo-Babylonian empire (see Isaiah 13; 21:1–10; Jeremiah 25:25). They were finally conquered by the Persians under Cyrus the Great in 550 BCE.

Javan represents Ionia, the area around the Aegean Sea, the home of the ancient Greeks, and is mentioned already in the eighth and seventh centuries in Assyrian documents as Iaman. Ezekiel refers to Javan along with Tubal and Meshesh as slave traders (Ezekiel 27:13). An echo of trade in Judean captives in cooperation with the Phoenicians and Philistines is found in Joel 4:6.

The four sons of Javan are Elishah, Tarshish, Kittim, and Dodanim, ordered in two pairs. The first pair are place names, the second, names of people in the plural. Elishah is

identified with Alashiya, mentioned in Hittite, Akkadian, Egyptian, and Ugaritic texts as well as Ezekiel 27:7 as “the coasts of Elishah”, identified as Cyprus or a part thereof.

Tarshish has been identified with sites as far apart as Tarsus in Asia Minor and Tartessos in Spain. The name appears in the ninth century BCE Nora inscription from Sardinia. Possibly, it was a common name for far-off Phoenician colonies where different metals like silver, iron, tin, and lead could be bartered (Ezekiel 27:12) or refined (Jeremiah 10:9), as Albright (1944, pp. 254–55) has suggested. In any case, it lent its name to worthy sea-going vessels that set sail both in the Mediterranean and Red Seas (e.g., I Kings 10:22; 22:49; Isaiah 23:1, 10, 14). Tarshish is mentioned in conjunction with Pul (Put? Cf. Ezekiel 27:10), Lydia, Meshech, Tubal, and Javan (Isaiah 66:19) and with Sheba and Dedan (Ezekiel 38:1; see also II Chronicles 20:36–37).

Kittim is commonly identified with the Phoenician colony of Kt(y), Greek Kition, modern Larnaka on Cyprus. They traded in boxwood furnishings inlaid with ivory (Ezekiel 27:6). Kittian mercenaries are mentioned in the ostraca from Arad, where they were stationed in the defense of the southern border of the late Judean monarchy.

The identification of Dodanim is an ancient crux with no ready solution. The parallel text in Chronicles 1:7, as well as the Septuagint and Samaritan versions of the Torah, read Rodanim, identified with the Isle of Rhodes. However, this may be no more than an interpretive reading as the Chronicles has done with the Mash/Meshech. Others have explained the name as a biform or a mistake for the Danuna mentioned for the first time in the El Amana letter number 151 (ca. 1360 BCE). The Dananim are known from the Azitawada and Kilamuwa inscriptions (9th–8th centuries BCE), the former being the ruler of that people residing in Adana, in present-day southern Turkey. In Assyrian sources, the island of Cyprus is called Yadnana, a reflex of this same name. This line of interpretation would place the Dodanim in close proximity to Elishah and Kittim.

Tubal and Meshech are a pair mentioned together in Ezekiel 27:13; 32:26; 38:2–3; 39:1 either with Javan or with Magog (see also Isaiah 66:19) and were located in eastern Asia Minor near Cilicia. They are mentioned together in Assyrian sources as Tabal and Mus(h)ku. Herodotus mentioned two neighboring peoples, Tibaroi and Moschoi, who lived on the southern shore of the Black Sea. Their geographic proximity and close political ties probably made them inseparable in the eyes of the Israelites, Assyrians, and Greeks.

Tiras, the youngest of the sons of Japheth, has been identified with one of the Sea Peoples called by the Egyptians *Twrwsha*. Tiras may also be reflected in the Greek *Tyrsenoi*, that is, the ancient Etruscans, who, according to Herodotus, migrated from Lydia in Asia Minor to Italy.

4.2. Ham

The second son of Noah to appear in the Table of Nations is Ham. However, according to Genesis 9:24, he seems to be the youngest.

Ham’s four sons are Kush, Mizraim (Egypt), Put, and Canaan. Kush’s genealogy gives him five sons and two grandsons, totaling seven (see Japheth above). Kush is Nubia, the land to the south of Egypt, beyond the first cataract at Aswan (Ezekiel 29:10). The name has come to stand generally for Africans residing on the southern extremity of the biblical world. The Septuagint occasionally translates the name Kush as Ethiopia. The sons of Kush, to the point that they can be identified, are found on the African and Asiatic sides of the Red Sea.

Complicating the picture is the similarity of the name Kush to other nations in the biblical world. The *Kwshw* are mentioned in the nineteenth century BCE Egyptian Ex-ecration Texts and probably refer to a West Semitic tribe living in the Negeb or in Seir (ancient Edom). In the Bible they are called Kush (II Chronicles 14:8) or Kushan, in league with Midian (Habakuk 3:7). It is probably in this context that we should understand the reference to Moses’s Kushite wife (Numbers 12:1), who was none other than the Midianite Zipporah.

Furthermore, between the eighteenth and the fourteenth centuries BCE, the Kassites, Kushshu in the Nuzi documents and Kossaios in classical Greek, ruled Babylon and were in direct contact with Egypt and Canaan. At the end of this period, the Canaanites in their correspondence with the Egyptian court refer on various occasions to the African Kushite mercenary forces by the name Kashi (EI Amarna letters 127, 131, and others). On the basis of homonymous association, one can better understand the intentional identification of apparently disparate elements as African peoples, Nimrod the Mesopotamian, and South Arabian sites (Sheba and Dedan) as all related to Kush.

Seba was the oldest son of Kush. It is often assumed that this is the South Arabian form of Hebrew Sheba. However, the several biblical references to this name in conjunction with Egypt and Kush (Isaiah 43:3; 45:14) and alongside Sheba, as in this genealogy as well as in Psalms 72:10, would indicate that this was an independent kingdom probably in Africa.

Havilah is mentioned twice in connection with the territories of Ishmael and Amalek, somewhere on the southern boundary of Israel (Genesis 25:18; I Samuel 15:7). Since Havilah reappears with Sheba in Joktan's genealogy (Genesis 10:29), it must be located in the Arabian Peninsula. On the other hand, it is mentioned in Genesis 2:11 as the land around which flows the Pishon, one of the four great rivers that flowed from the Garden of Eden; there one finds gold, bdellium, and lapis lazuli. Note that the Gihon, the second river, encircles the land of Kush. The connection of these remote riverine areas (see Isaiah 18:1–2) with Eden in Mesopotamia assumes a different conception of world geography than our own.

Sabta (Septuagint: Sabata) has no agreed-upon identification. However, of all the various suggestions in Africa and in the Arabian Peninsula, perhaps the most suitable would be the city of Sabota, the ancient capital of the South Arabian kingdom of Hazarmaveth, 420 km northeast of Aden. Sabbeca remains unidentified.

Raamah has been identified, though not without linguistic difficulties, with the South Arabian city of Rgmt located in the district of Majran. This area lies between that of Dedan to the north and the kingdom of Sheba to the southeast.

Independent of this name-list of Afro-Arabian sons of Kush is the passage on Nimrod (vss. 8–12). Needless to say, this section has raised many problems as far as the suggested connection between Kush and Mesopotamia and the introduction of narrative between genealogies. Furthermore, the identity of Nimrod and a few of the cities he established remains in doubt.

Regarding a Kushite Nimrod, as mentioned above, there seems to be an underlying homophonous association between Kush and the Kassites, who controlled southern Mesopotamia for several hundred years during the late second millennium BCE. This identification was intentional in the present context. Certainly, from the biblical point of view, the Kushites lived in Babylon with the rest of Noah's descendants before the Dispersion (Genesis 11:1–9). The Nimrod story has a structural function in the Table, for by adding his name to the number of nations listed in the fixed genealogies, plus Noah's three sons, the sum of seventy is attained. Then again, the passage gives details about an ancient monarch and about the beginning of post-diluvian urban civilization. Various scholarly attempts to identify Nimrod with an historical Mesopotamian king or with a mythological god have been suggested (Levin 2002). Perhaps Nimrod is a composite figure of the ideal Mesopotamian king. In any case, Nimrod was the subject of Israelite legend and prophecy (Genesis 10:9; Micah 5:5).

The "mainstays" (Speiser 1964) of Nimrod's kingdom were the ancient capitals of Babylon, Erech and Accad, which, along with Sippar and Nippur in local Mesopotamian tradition, became the major centers of post-diluvian urban society. The last named Calneh is unknown from Mesopotamia, though an inappropriate north Syrian namesake is well documented (e.g., Amos 6:2; Isaiah 10:9). Albright (1944), however, has convincingly suggested that the word be vocalized *kullannah* "all of them (i.e., the above three cities)" to be located in the Land of Shinar, ancient Sumer.

Nimrod's building activity continued into northern Assyria, emphasizing that area's cultural debt to Sumer and Babylon in the south. Two of the four listed cities, Calah and Nineveh, are well-known capitals of Assyria. The other two, Rehoboth-Ir and Resen, are unknown and are probably descriptive phrases of the two better-known cities or parts thereof (Hurowitz 2008). Calah was the larger and more impressive city until it was supplanted by Nineveh at the end of the eighth century. It is noteworthy that the modern name of Calah is Nimrud.

Mizraim "fathered" seven nations, all written in the plural, who were either part of Egypt or dependent upon her (Görg 2000). Cassuto has pointed out that the order of these seven follows the progression from a simple two-radical stem "Lud" to a three- "Lahab" and then four-letter stem Patrus.

The Ludim are generally identified with Lydia in Asia Minor. However, an African location is preferred in light of Jeremiah's and Ezekiel's prophecies to the gentiles, where Lud is mentioned along with Put (Jeremiah 46:9) and Kush (Ezekiel 30:5) as archers serving Egypt. Anamim and especially Lehabim have been located in Cyrenaica or ancient Libya.

Patrusim is clearly the identifiable province of Upper Egypt (Isaiah 11:11, Jeremiah 44:1; 15; Ezekiel 29:14; 30:14). Naphtuhim has been understood as referring to the north land, i.e., Lower Egypt. The name has a Hebrew plural ending attached to what seems to be a preserved Egyptian term *n-Ptah*, i.e., "belonging to the god Ptah" (Görg 2000, p. 29). Ptah's sacred city was Memphis south of the Delta, which was one of the ancient capitals of Egypt. Its Egyptian name was *Hut-ka-Ptah*, i.e., "The abode of the soul of Ptah". When the Greeks arrived, they could not pronounce the gutturals, so they called that area "Aigyptos", which became the European name for the entire country.

The Kasluhim remain unidentified. The mention of the Philistines as coming from their land is also difficult, since the Philistines are associated in the Bible with the last members of this list, i.e., Caphtor (e.g., Kftyw, Akkadian: Kaptara Ugaritic: KPTR), ancient Crete (Amos 9:73; Jeremiah 47:4). Note that the Philistines or a part thereof are also called Cretans (Ezekiel 25:16; Zephania 2:5, Cf. also II Samuel 8:18). An interesting reference to the Caphtorim is found in Deuteronomy 2:23, where they are described as supplanting the native Avvim, who dwelt in open settlements probably to the south of Gaza (see also Joshua 13:3) bordering the land of Egypt.

There is a difference of opinion regarding the location of Put, Ham's second son. Some identify it with Punt in the Horn of Africa (Somalia), while most recent commentators, following the ancient Greek and Latin translations, tend to identify Put with Libya (see also Nahum 3:9 and Josephus, *Antiquities* 1:6:132).

The list of the Canaanite nations is a literary unit in its own right. It has been studied by Tomoo Ishida (1979) along with parallel two- (Genesis 13:7; 34:30; etc.), five- (Exodus 13:5; etc.), six- (Exodus 3:8; 17; 23:23; 33:2, etc.), seven- (Deuteronomy 7:1; Joshua 3:10; 24:11), eight- (Ezekiel 9:1), and ten- (Genesis 15:19–21) name lists of indigenous Canaanites. Ishida noted the inner structure of these lists presents three documented designations for the native population: Canaanites, Hittites, or Amorites, and three or four of the lesser-known ethnic groups: Perizites, Hivites, Jebusites, and Girgashites. He assumed a basic six-name list that is sometimes expanded into seven. The totality of the indigenous population can be summarized by mentioning one of the major and one of the minor peoples, e.g., Canaanites and Perizites (Genesis 13:7; 34:30; Judges 1:4–5). As is the case in Genesis 10, the name-list is sometimes expanded, as in Ezra 9:1, adding three non-Canaanite nations: Ammonites, Moabites, and Egyptians, or in Genesis 15:19, adding the Kenites, Kenizites, Kadmonites, and Rephites.

The sons of Canaan in the Table of Nations fall into two clearly discernable groups of six indigenous nations, including the eponymic Canaan, Heth, the Jebusites, the Amorites, the Girgashites, and the Hivites, and six Phoenician–Syrian kingdoms including Sidon and the coastal city states of Arka(ta), Siannu, Arwad and Sumur plus the neo-Hittite kingdom of Hamath in the Syrian hinterland. Canaan, Sidon, and Heth are proper names; the others are adjectival forms. Their order seems to be based on a chiastic relationship between Sidon

and the other minor kingdoms, and Heth and the native peoples of the Land of Canaan. It is possible that underlying this order is the assumption that Sidon “the first born” should be considered the “father” of the northern city-states, while Heth is the “father” of the southern indigenous nations (Figure 1).

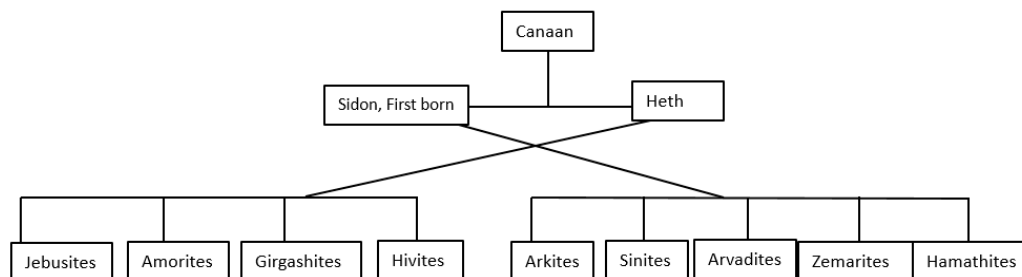


Figure 1. Descendants of Canaan.

At this point in the Table of Nations, a geographic aside, describing the borders of the land of Canaan, is added. The starting point is again Sidon in the north, probably referring to the kingdom of Sidon, including the Phoenician coast. The southwestern corner of Canaan was the land of Gerar and city of Gaza, probably indicating that at this time Nahal Besor (Wadi Gaza) was identified as the Brook of Egypt. This would be another case of “anticipation”, i.e., a literary technique of introducing seemingly parenthetical information early in the book that will become significant later in the narration (Sarna 1981). It seems to me that noting such a boundary line here illuminates the later description of Jacob’s funeral cortege, which encamped near Abel-Mizraim, as viewed by the Canaanites (Gen 50: 10–11) (Demsky 1993).⁸ Furthermore, the southern border extended eastward from Gerar through Beersheba and Arad (Numbers 21:1; 33:40) to the five cities of the plains south of the Dead Sea: Sodom, Gomorrah, Admah, Seboim, and Lasha’ (also called Bela’ or Zoar—Genesis 14:8). This border is the geographic background of the patriarchal journeys of Abraham and Isaac that will unfold in this area of the Promised Land (Genesis 19:28; 20:1).

4.3. Shem

Of the five sons of Shem, only two are given in detail: Aram, the youngest, and Arpachshad, the third. The four sons of Aram are Uz, Hul, Getter, and Mash, of whom almost nothing of substance is known. These four names may be ancient tribal or place names (see Genesis 22:21). Uz might be connected with that land mentioned in Job 1:1 or, less likely, with the Horite namesake in Genesis 36:28 (see Lamentations 4:21). However, this archaic name, as well as Buz (Genesis 22:21), continues to appear in Jeremiah (25:20, 23) as a designation for close and distant neighbors. Mash might be a geographic term for some part of the Lebanon mentioned in the story of Gilgamesh (Table IX, col. 2: lines 1–2). Later versions and even the parallel in Chronicles attempt to give a corrected reading on the basis of a better-known name (LXX, Chronicles: Meshech; Samaritan Torah: Massa). The position of Aram as the youngest son of Shem as compared to the Nahor name-list reflects the rising importance of the Arameans by the end of the second millennium BCE in the constellation of peoples around the Fertile Crescent.

At this point in the chapter, several of Abraham’s ancestors are mentioned. Moving from ethnic and geographic names to personalities, the genealogy changes from a segmented to a linear form: Arpachshad, Shelah, and Eber.

The name Arpachshad still defies explanation. The second half of the name may be a reflex of Chesed (Genesis 22:22) and represents the home of the Chaldeans, from where the Patriarchs sojourned (Genesis 11:31). Eber has been cited above in one of the designations of Shem, “the father of all the children of Eber”. He is the eponymous ancestor of the Hebrews, who include the Israelites.

Peleg and Joktan are Eber’s sons. The latter is the eponymous father of the last segmented genealogy in the Table, including thirteen (south) Arabian tribes and kingdoms.

The number is problematic and has been viewed as either an expansion of an original twelve-son list or a fourteen-unit name-list including Joktan. However, it might have been conceived to balance the other above-mentioned thirteen offspring of Shem.

The identification of most of the names is uncertain. However, Hazarmaut and Sheba are two known South Arabian kingdoms and Ophir, the source of high-quality gold, was probably located on the east coast of Africa. Uzal may be the same as Meuzal, mentioned in Ezekiel 27:19 as trading in polished iron, cassia, and calamus.

Chapter eleven, verses 10–32 presents a ten-generation linear genealogy from Shem down to Abraham, giving biographical data reminiscent of chapter five. This list reconnects the reader to the narrative.

By focusing on the so-called Table of Nations in Genesis 10, I have tried to show how genealogy became a literary genre in the Bible. Noted were such literary devices as chiasms, anticipation, and symbolic numbers, which enhance the message of these sources. Furthermore, introducing linear genealogies with a structural depth of ten generations was a means of neatly summarizing earlier generations without narrative. On the other hand, segmented genealogies placed at transitional junctures in the narrative served as pauses in the overall story.

Funding: This research received no external funding.

Institutional Review Board Statement: Not applicable.

Informed Consent Statement: Not applicable.

Data Availability Statement: Data are contained within the article.

Conflicts of Interest: The authors declare no conflict of interest.

Notes

- ¹ The other great corpus of biblical genealogies is found in I Chronicles chs. 1–9, forming the introduction to the Chronicler's history (ca. 400 BCE) of the Davidic dynasty. Implying that David's royal legitimacy goes back to the beginning of history, the Chronicler ingeniously summarized the book of Genesis in his first chapter by avoiding the narrative and editing the genealogies. Chs 2–8 contain many short segmented tribal and clan lineages (in additions to census and priestly lists) that reflect the tribal kinship and settlement patterns of the land of Israel during the first half of the first millennium BCE (Densky 1971). Finally, ch. 9 is a collection of lists of clans that inhabited Jerusalem, David's capital.
- ² This chapter or a part thereof was recopied in the book of I Chronicles 1:1–36. It was also the basis of the description of the sons of Noah in the book of Jubilees 8:9–10. Noteworthy are the modern commentaries that tried to understand this chapter and its context from a historic and literary point of view (Simons 1954; Cassuto 1959; Grntz 1962; Sarna 1989; Oded 1986; Rainey 2006; Speiser 1962, 1964).
- ³ The biblical world reflected in this text extends from the Greek islands in the west, includes Anatolia, and extends to the Iranian plateau in the east. In the south, it includes peoples of the Arabian Peninsula and northern Sudan, as well as Cyrenaica, west of Egypt.
- ⁴ In this system, there are shorter units of seven/fourteen nation (sons of Japheth; descendants of Kush) or of twelve and six units or certain tribal leagues (Nahor, Ishmael, Keturah, Esau, Israel).
- ⁵ Note the reference to the tenth generation in unacceptable unions, Deuteronomy 23: 3: bastards; *ibid.* vs 4: Moabites and Ammonites.
- ⁶ See Deut. 23:8–9.
- ⁷ Compare the order of the species into four genera (animals, birds, insects, and fish) and subsequent division into "clean and unclean" according to their physical characteristics (Leviticus 11: 1–30; Deuteronomy 14: 9–21). Note, in this text, skin pigmentation was not a factor for identifying races.
- ⁸ Another example of anticipation is the mention of Rebecca in the Nahor family tree (Gen 22:23), who will be the wife of Isaac (*ibid.* ch. 24).

References

- Albright, Willam F. 1944. The End of "Calneh in Shinar". *Journal of Near Eastern Studies* 3: 254–55. [[CrossRef](#)]
- Bendor, Shunia. 1996. *The Social Structure of Ancient Israel: The Institutions of the Family from the Settlement to the End of the Monarchy*. Jerusalem: Simor.
- Cassuto, Umberto. 1959. *A Commentary on the Book of Genesis, Part 2: From Noah to Abraham*. Hebrew: Hebrew University Press.

- Demsky, Aaron. 1971. The Genealogy of Gibeon: Biblical and Epigraphic Considerations. *Bulletin of the American Schools of Oriental Research* 202: 16–23. [CrossRef]
- Demsky, Aaron. 1993. The Route of Jacob's Funeral Cortege and the Problem of 'Eber Hayyarden (Gen. 50:10–11). In *Minhah le-Nahum*. Edited by Marc Brettler and Michael Fishbane. Sheffield: Sheffield Press, pp. 54–64.
- Demsky, Aaron. 2016. Reading Biblical Genealogies. *TheTorah.com*. Available online: <https://thetorah.com/article/reading-biblical-genealogies> (accessed on 1 November 2023).
- Evans-Pritchard, Edward E. 1951. *Kinship and Marriage among the Nuer*. Oxford: Oxford University Press.
- Fortes, Meyer. 1949. *The Web of Kinship among the Tallensi*. London: Routledge Press.
- Görg, Manfred. 2000. Die 'sohne Ägyptens' in den sogenannten Völkertafel. In *Ägypten und der östliche Mittelmeerraum in 1. Jahrtausend v. Chr.*. Edited by Manfred Görg and Gunther Hölbl. Verlag Unser Wissen: pp. 23–46.
- Grintz, Jehoshua M. 1962. Table of Nations. In *Encyclopedia Biblica*. Hebrew: Bialik Institute, vol. 4, cols. 439–45.
- Hurowitz, Victor A. 2008. In Search of Resen (Genesis 10:12): Dūr-Šarrukīn? In *Birkat Shalom: Studies in the Bible, Ancient Near Eastern Literature, and Postbiblical Judaism Presented to Shalom M. Paul on the Occasion of His Seventieth Birthday*. Edited by Chaim Cohen, Victor Avigdor Hurowitz, Avi M. Hurvitz, Yochanan Muffs, Baruch J. Schwartz and Jeffrey H. Tigay. Winona Lake: Penn State Press, pp. 513–26.
- Ishida, Tomoo. 1979. The Structure and Historical Implications of the Lists of Pre-Israelite Nations. *Biblica* 60: 461–90.
- Johnson, Marshall D. 1969. *The Purpose of Biblical Genealogies with Special Reference to the Genealogies of Jesus*. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press.
- Levin, Yigal. 2001. Understanding Biblical Genealogies. *Currents in Research* 9: 2001.
- Levin, Yigal. 2002. Nimrod the Mighty, King of Kish, King of Sumer and Akkad. *Vetus Testamentum* 52: 350–66. [CrossRef]
- Levin, Yigal. 2012. The Family of Man: The Genre and Purpose of Genesis 10. In *Looking at the Ancient Near East and the Bible Through the Same Eyes*. Edited by Kathleen Abraham and Joseph Fleishman. Bethesda: CDL Press, pp. 291–308.
- Malamat, Abraham. 1973. Tribal Societies: Biblical Genealogies and African Lineage Systems. *Archives Européennes de Sociologie* 14: 126–36. [CrossRef]
- Oded, Bustenai. 1986. The Table of Nations (Genesis 10): A Socio-Cultural Approach. *ZAW* 98: 14–31. [CrossRef]
- Peters, Emrys. 1960. The Proliferation of Segments in the Lineage of Bedouin of Cyrenaica. *JRAI* 90: 29–53.
- Rainey, Anson F. 2006. The Biblical View of World Society. In *The Sacred Bridge*. Jerusalem: Carta Publication, pp. 26–28.
- Sarna, Nahum M. 1981. The Anticipatory Use of Information as a Literary Feature of the Genesis Narratives. In *The Creation of Sacred Literature*. Edited by Richard E. Friedman. Berkeley: University of California Press, pp. 76–82.
- Sarna, Nahum M. 1989. *The Jewish Publication Society Torah Commentary—Genesis*. Philadelphia: The Jewish Publication Society, pp. 67–80.
- Simons, Jan Jozef. 1954. The 'Table of Nations' (Genesis 10): Its General Structure and Meaning. *Oudtestamentische Studien* 10: 155–84.
- Speiser, Ephraim A. 1962. Ethnic Divisions of Man. *Interpreters Dictionary of the Bible* 2: 235–42.
- Speiser, Ephraim A. 1964. *Genesis Anchor Bible*. Garden City: Doubleday.
- Wilson, Robert R. 1977. *Genealogy and History in the Biblical World*. New Haven: Yale University Press.
- Wilson, Robert R. 1984. *Sociological Approaches to the Old Testament*. Philadelphia: Fortress Press.

Disclaimer/Publisher's Note: The statements, opinions and data contained in all publications are solely those of the individual author(s) and contributor(s) and not of MDPI and/or the editor(s). MDPI and/or the editor(s) disclaim responsibility for any injury to people or property resulting from any ideas, methods, instructions or products referred to in the content.