

The Line of Shem

10: 21-31

DIG: What was significant about the descendants of Shem in relation to the Jewish people? Who was the key person to come through the line of Shem? Why was he so important? What is fundamental about the number seventy?

REFLECT: How could it be possible that the line of Shem has affected your life? If you had a son or a daughter, which line would you want them to be a part of spiritually? Japheth? Ham? Or Shem? Why? What can you do to make that a possibility? What is beyond your control?

Shem is the last brother discussed because he is the most crucial. Although his offspring included the Arabs, the line of faith in the LORD came through **Shem** and his descendants, the Hebrews. **Shem** lived 502 years after the Flood, and that means he lived until after Tara, Abraham's father died. In fact, Noah lived until Tara was 128 years old.

Sons were also born to **Shem**, whose older brother was **Japheth**. This shows that **Shem** was the firstborn son of Noah although he is dealt with last. Although **Eber** occurs as a name far down the list among the **Shemites** (Semites), his importance is called to our attention early in the passage: **Shem was the ancestor of all the sons of Eber (10:21)**.¹⁹⁵ **Eber** in Hebrew is *Ever* and is the source of the word for Hebrew. So what this means is that **Shem** was the father of the Hebrews. And this is the main significance of his line. So, it is not just **Shem** that is crucial, but also **Eber**.

The five sons of **Shem** were **Elam, Asshur, Arphaxad, Lud and Aram (10:22)**. The first son was **Elam**. His descendants settled east of Babylon and later became part of Persia. **Chedorlaomer**, king of **Elam**, was the apparent leader of the confederacy that invaded Canaan during the days of **Abram (14:4-5)**. The ancient city of **Susa**, or **Shushan**, east of Mesopotamia, was their capital. The **Elamites** apparently later merged with others, especially the **Medes** (descendants of **Madai** and therefore of **Japheth**), to form the Persian Empire.¹⁹⁶ The second son was **Asshur**. His descendants settled in the land of Assyria along the Tigris River and the capital of **Asshur** was **Nineveh**. These are the Semitic Assyrians who supplanted the Hamitic Assyrians in 10:11. The third son was **Arphaxad**. The Jewish historian **Josephus** refers to him and the **Chaldeans**, northeast of **Nineveh**. **This is line that the Seed of the woman (3:15), or the Messiah, comes through, so this is the Seed son.** The fourth son was **Lud** and his descendants settled in **Lydia**, in what is now western Turkey. And the fifth son was **Aram**. His descendants settled in **Aramia** between **Damascus** and the **Euphrates River**, better known today as **Syria**. By the time of Christ, **Aramaic** would be the

common language for the leading nations of the ancient world, including Assyria and Babylonia. Some of the TaNaKh (portions of **Daniel** and **Ezra**) were written in Aramaic, and it was the common spoken language among the Jews at the time of Christ.¹⁹⁷

The four sons of Aram (and the four grandsons of Shem) were Uz, Hul, Gether and Meshech (10:23). Little is known about these four, but they are all Syrian tribes between Armenia and Mesopotamia. **The first son was Uz.** His descendants located in northwest Mesopotamia (**22:21**), and perhaps the same was the home of Job since **Uz** is mentioned as Job's home in **Job 1:1**. It may also be the same as the land of **Uz** in **Jeremiah 25:20**. **The second son was Hul.** Josephus locates **him** in Armenia, but more likely **he** was located in the region of Leja. **The third son was Gether.** His specific location is unknown, but Josephus put **him** in Bactria, in northeast Afghanistan. **The fourth son was Meshech.** Again the specific location is again unknown, but puts **his** descendants, the Mesena, at the mouth of the Euphrates. The rest of this section focuses on the line of **Arphaxad** because **he** was the **Seed son**.

Shem's third son Arphaxad, was the father of Shelah. Where **he** settled is unknown, but **he** is mentioned in the Septuagint and the book of Jubilee as being **the father of Cainan**. They both say that **Arphaxad was the father of Cainan, and Cainan was the father of Shelah**. So in both of these extra-biblical books **Cainan** was between **Arphaxad** and **Shelah**. And indeed this was the order written by **Luke**. **He** writes that **Shelah was the son of Cainan, and Cainan was the son of Arphaxad (Luke 35-36)**. **Luke** knew of **Cainan** from these other records at that time.

Then the Bible tells us that **Shelah, or Shem's grandson, was the father of Eber, Shem's great-grandson (10:24)**. The descendants of **Eber** settled in **Ur of the Chaldeans (11:31)**, **Haran (11:27)** and **Paddan Aram (25:20)** - for **he** is the father of the Hebrews.

Two of Shem's great, great grandsons were born to Eber; one was named Peleg, because in his time the earth was divided. This was an extremely important event and **Eber** named **his son** in commemoration of it. The word **peleg** means *division because* the language division at the Tower of Babel occurred during the time of **his** birth. Therefore, the division of languages at Babel happened five generations after the Flood. **His brother was named Joktan (10:25),** which means *the younger son*, and **he** lived in southern Arabia. **Joktan was the father of thirteen sons** and eventually thirteen nations. The fact that all of **Joktan's sons** are listed, and none of **Peleg's** may suggest that **Shem** (the probable author of this section) was living near **Joktan** at the time and so was more familiar with the names of **his sons** than of those of **his** other descendants. In any case, these names were more prominent in the day in which this was written than they have been in later times.¹⁹⁸

His first four sons were **Almodad, Sheleph, Hazarmaveth, and Jerah (10:26)**, all of which also became Arabian tribes. The first son was **Almodad**. His descendants were a south Arabian people of the tribe of Al-Mudad. The second son was **Sheleph**. His descendants were also a south Arabian people of the tribe of Sulaf in Yemen. The third son was **Hazarmaveth** and his descendants located in Saudi Arabia. His name is preserved in the term *Hadhramautic*, which is one of the most important dialects of the South Arabic language. And the fourth son was **Jerah**.

The fifth son was **Hadoram**. His descendants located in the Adramitae in South Arabia. The sixth son was **Uzal**; this was the old name for modern Sana'a, which is the capital of Yemen. The seventh son was **Diklah**, which means *date-palm grove*. His descendants also settled in the area of the Yemen (10:27).

The eighth son was **Obal**; his descendants also settled in south Arabia or Yemen (10:28). The ninth son was **Abimael**, but nothing about him is known. The tenth son was **Sheba**. His descendants became the Sabians (from **Seba**) of southwest Arabia, and were also listed as part of **Ham's** line in 10:7.

The eleventh son was **Ophir**. His descendants settled in Somalia, which was famous for its gold (**First Chronicles 29:4; Second Chronicles 8:18; Job 22:24, 28:16; and Psalm 45:9**). The twelfth son was **Havilah** and he settled on the west coast of Arabia, north of Yemen. He was also mentioned in Ham's line in 10:7. The thirteenth son was **Jobab**, who settled in southwest Saudi Arabia. It is also the town of Juhaibab in the area of Mecca. All were sons of **Joktan (10:29)**.

The borders of the region where they lived stretched from **Mesha**, the western border, toward **Sephar**, the eastern border, in the eastern hill country (10:30).

These are the sons of **Shem** by their clans and languages, in their territories and nations (10:31). There are a total of twenty-six nations that cover six generations.

In **Chapter 10**, the Hebrew word *eretz*, or *land* is used fourteen times (2X7). The Hebrew word *bnei*, or *the sons of* is used 14 times (2X7). The Hebrew words *avi*, or *the father of*, *banim*, or *son*, *toldot*, or *the generations of*, and *yalad*, or *the offspring of* are used 28 times (4X7). In addition, when we add up the nations that came from **Shem, Ham** and **Japheth**, we discover a very intriguing fact: The total number is **seventy** (fourteen from **Japheth**, thirty from **Ham** and twenty-six from **Shem**). This is a further example of the significance of the number seven that we have observed so often up to this point in **Genesis** (see **Ae - The Number Seven**). But it is more. It would also seem to be an anticipation of the number of the members of Jacob's family in Egypt, who were **seventy in all (Genesis**

46:27 and **Exodus 1:5**). The **seventy** nations of **Chapter 10** are conveniently summarized in **First Chronicles 1:5-23**, where they are listed in the same exact order.¹⁹⁹

From this point on, the number **seventy** will be particularly associated with the nation of Isra'el. Thus the angel Gabriel would say: **seventy 'sevens' are decreed for your people (Daniel 9:24)**, and Isra'el's history can be understood within a framework of successive cycles of **seventy 'sevens.'** Isra'el was led by **seventy** elders (**Numbers 11:16** and **25**) and later there were **seventy** members of the Jewish Supreme Court (see my commentary on **The Life of Christ Lg - The Great Sanhedrin**). **Seventy** scholars translated the TaNaKh into Greek to produce the Septuagint, or the Hebrew version of the Scriptures. Moses wrote that man's allotted life span was **seventy** years (**Psalm 90:10**). The Babylonian captivity lasted **seventy** years; and the Romans destroyed Jerusalem and Herod's Temple **seventy** years after Herod's attempt to murder **Jesus**, the Jewish **Messiah**, in **His** infancy.²⁰⁰