God's Heart for the Nations
Genesis 10

Let's pray – Lord God, Creator of heaven and earth, you are the One who knows our name. Would you open the eyes of our hearts today and shine the light of your truth into our minds, illuminating the darkness with your very presence, so that we might understand ourselves better and surrender more fully to your will. In Jesus' name, Amen.

INTRODUCTION – God's List of Names

As I have been preparing to preach this week, there is a song that has been running through my mind. I'm sure you'll recognize it. It goes like this:

You better watch out
You better not cry
You better not pout
I'm telling you why
Santa Claus is coming to town

He's making a list,
Checking it twice,
Gonna find out who's naughty or nice.
Santa Claus is coming to town

He sees you when you're sleeping
He knows when you're awake
He knows if you've been bad or good
So be good for goodness sake

You better watch out
You better not cry
You better not pout
I'm telling you why
Santa Claus is coming to town

The main point of this song appears to be to convince young children that there is someone watching everything they do… someone who sees when they are sleeping, who knows when they are awake; someone who knows if they have been bad or good.

The goal is, therefore, to encourage children to be good for goodness' sake.

Because the one who is watching them is doing so to find out if they have been naughty or nice. He keeps 2 lists – one for the good kids and one for the bad kids.

The incentive for their good behavior is the promise that they will be rewarded with gifts on Christmas morning if they behave themselves. However, if their name ends up on the naughty list, all they can hope for is a lump of coal in their stocking.

Spoiler Alert - If you are here today with your children and you haven't told them the truth about Santa Claus, you might want to cover their ears for what I'm about to say next.

As grownups we know that Santa Claus is not real. The myth of Santa Claus developed around a man who lived in the 4th century by the name of Saint Nicholas. He was a Christian Bishop, born in Turkey, who was renowned for his generosity with children and his secret gift giving. According to Wikipedia, he was born on March 15, in the year 270 and he died on December 6, in the year 343.

Sorry to have to be the bearer of bad news, children. But in case you missed it, Santa Claus was just a man who died almost 2,000 years ago. He doesn't really live at the north pole or keep lists of naughty and nice children. Nor does he fly around the world in a reindeer driven sleigh the night before Christmas, sliding down chimneys and delivering presents as a reward to those who have made it onto his nice list. While some families enjoy the fun of engaging their children in magical thinking and imaginary play and so they perpetuate the myth of Santa Claus, it is simply that – a myth that was made up for fun.

In contrast to the myth of Santa Claus, there is Someone else who does watch over us. He has some similarities but some significant differences with Santa Claus. Like Santa Claus, this person sounds like He could be mythical, but in contrast, He is in fact quite real.

He has been alive forever and will never die. A few hundred years before the myth of Santa Claus began, some humans tried to kill this person, and for 3 days they thought they had succeeded. But he rose from the dead, because there was no sin in him, so death could not keep its hold on him. Someday he will come back to establish his kingdom and rule over all the nations with justice and with righteousness and peace. It will be wonderful when that happens. Even better than living at the north pole.

In the meantime, while he is patiently working out his purposes for us, this person does watch over us, and He knows us each by name.

Who is this person, and what is his name? His name is the Lord. He is God. Like the mythical Santa Claus, God keeps a record of every person who has ever lived. But the purposes of God's records are different than the purpose of Santa Claus' lists naughty and nice list. Today, we're going to read out loud one of the Lord God's ancient lists of people to see what we can discover about God and about ourselves in relationship to him.

The context for the list of names we are about to read is this: Following the great flood, Noah and his family stepped off the ark, along with all the land animals God had preserved through the flood. They all stepped into a world that had been completely wiped out. As they began again, God gave them the same blessing and mandate he had given to Adam and Eve at the very beginning in the Garden of Eden.

> "Be fruitful, multiply and fill the earth" (Gen 1:28, 9:1)

This list of names we are about to read in Genesis 10 shows us how Noah's descendants fulfilled God's mandate to be fruitful, to multiply and to fill the earth.

The remainder of the events in Genesis and the rest of the Pentateuch take place against the backdrop of this genealogical list. It may seem very dry as we read it, and I'm sure I will mispronounce most of the names. But hang in there with me as we go through it. It is a very significant list. Let's read it together now and then we'll discuss why it matters.

Genesis 10:1-32

10 This is the account of Shem, Ham and Japheth, Noah's sons, who themselves had sons after the flood.

The Japhethites

2 The sons[a] of Japheth:

> Gomer, Magog, Madai, Javan, Tubal, Meshek and Tiras.

3 The sons of Gomer:

> Ashkenaz, Riphath and Togarmah.

4 The sons of Javan:

> Elishah, Tarshish, the Kittites and the Rodanites.[b] 5 (From these the maritime peoples spread out into their territories by their clans within their nations, each with its own language.)

The Hamites

6 The sons of Ham:

> Cush, Egypt, Put and Canaan.

7 The sons of Cush:

Seba, Havilah, Sabtah, Raamah and Sabteka.

The sons of Raamah:

Sheba and Dedan.

8 Cush was the father[c] of Nimrod, who became a mighty warrior on the earth. 9 He was
a mighty hunter before the Lord; that is why it is said, “Like Nimrod, a mighty hunter
before the Lord.” 10 The first centers of his kingdom were Babylon, Uruk, Akkad and
Kalneh, in[d] Shinar.[e] 11 From that land he went to Assyria, where he built Nineveh,
Rehoboth Ir,[f] Calah 12 and Resen, which is between Nineveh and Calah—which is the
great city.

13 Egypt was the father of

the Ludites, Anamites, Lehabites, Naphtuhites, 14 Pathrusites, Kasluhites (from
whom the Philistines came) and Caphtorites.

15 Canaan was the father of
Sidon his firstborn,[g] and of the Hittites, 16 Jebusites, Amorites, Girgashites,
17 Hivites, Arkites, Sinites, 18 Arvadites, Zemarites and Hamathites.

Later the Canaanite clans scattered 19 and the borders of Canaan reached from Sidon
toward Gerar as far as Gaza, and then toward Sodom, Gomorrah, Admah and Zeboyim,
as far as Lasha.

20 These are the sons of Ham by their clans and languages, in their territories and
nations.

The Semites

21 Sons were also born to Shem, whose older brother was[h] Japheth; Shem was the
ancestor of all the sons of Eber.

22 The sons of Shem:

Elam, Ashur, Arphaxad, Lud and Aram.

23 The sons of Aram:

Uz, Hul, Gether and Meshek.[i]

24 Arphaxad was the father of[j] Shelah,

and Shelah the father of Eber.

25 Two sons were born to Eber:

One was named Peleg,[k] because in his time the earth was divided; his brother was named Joktan.

26 Joktan was the father of

Almodad, Sheleph, Hazarmaveth, Jerah, 27 Hadoram, Uzal, Diklah, 28 Obal, Abimael, Sheba, 29 Ophir, Havilah and Jobab. All these were sons of Joktan.

30 The region where they lived stretched from Mesha toward Sephar, in the eastern hill country.

31 These are the sons of Shem by their clans and languages, in their territories and nations.

32 These are the clans of Noah's sons, according to their lines of descent, within their nations. From these the nations spread out over the earth after the flood.

So, why did God preserve this massive list of names for us to read? Why is it so important? What does it tell us about God and what does it tell us about who we are in relationship to God and to each other?

This list is significant for several reasons.

1. This list reveals a common origin, and therefore a common bond between all the nations of the world.

Often called the "Table of Nations," Genesis 10 is a representative list of all the descendants that came from Noah's 3 sons, Shem, Ham and Japeth. Traditionally, this list is understood to include the names of the founding fathers of 70 nations:-

- 14 descendants of Japeth
- 30 descendants of Ham
- 26 descendants of Shem.

(Due to some ancient manuscript and translation variations, some translations see this as a list of 72 nations. But most recognize it as a list of 70 descendants.)[i]

In the Bible, certain numbers carry symbolic significance. The numbers 3, 7, 10, 12, 40 and 70 are all such numbers.

70 is a number that is meant to convey completeness and fullness. So, when we see 70 nations listed here, we are meant to understand that this list symbolically represents the fullness or completeness or totality of all the nations of the earth.

It doesn't mean that every single nation that descended from Noah's 3 sons will be listed here. But it does mean that the names that are recorded here symbolize the entirety of all the nations that followed.

And it's not just the entirety of the nations represented here. 3 times we are told this list represents the clans, languages, territories (lands) and nations that descended from Noahs' 3 sons (Gen 10:5, 20, 31).

My husband made up a map for us to see roughly where these nations spread out to.

Japeth's descendants primarily went north, settling across Europe and Eurasia. They are often associated with the Indo-European peoples. They settled in places we now know as Greece, Europe, Russia, Persia, India.

Ham's descendants primarily occupied regions of Africa, Mesopotamia and parts of the Mediterranean. They included groups like the Canaanites and the Cushites. Cush is thought to have settled in Ethiopia, and Put in Libya.

Shem's descendants primarily settled in the Middle East and parts of Asia. They include the Semitic people such as the Hebrews and the Arabs.

What does all this mean for us today?

It means that every person on the earth is related to each other no matter where on the map we find ourselves. We share much of the same DNA because we all come from the same original parents. Adam and Eve before the flood, and after the flood, we all descended from Noah, and one of his 3 sons.

No matter what language we speak or what country we came from or what color our skin is, we are family. We are all brothers and sisters, or distant cousins.

There is no place for racism or looking down on anther people group because their culture or language is different from our own.

The apostle Paul picked up this theme in his address to the crowd in Athens, when he found an altar with an inscription to the "unknown God." In Acts 17 he said:

> ***24*** *"The God who made the world and everything in it is the Lord of heaven and earth and does not live in temples built by human hands.* ***25*** *And he is not served by human hands, as if he needed anything. Rather, he himself gives everyone life and breath and everything else.*
>
> ***26*** *From one man he made all the nations, that they should inhabit the whole earth; and he marked out their appointed times in history and the boundaries of their lands.* ***27*** *God did this so that they would seek him and perhaps reach out for him and find him, though he is not far from any one of us.* ***28*** *'For in him we live*

and move and have our being.'[b] As some of your own poets have said, 'We are his offspring'[c] (Acts 17:24-28).

That means no nation has come into being by accident. God has made us all and marked out the times in history and the boundaries of our lands in the hopes that we might seek him and perhaps reach out for him and find him.

To look down on people from another country, to see them as somehow less than us, is to look down on someone who comes from your own family tree and who, like you, has been made in the image of God.

All humans share a common origin, so there is no place for prejudice or racism. We all have infinite dignity, value and worth before God, because we are all his offspring.

That is one very important thing we learn from this Table of Nations in Gen 11.

2. A second thing this Table of Nations shows us is that God cares about real people, real places and real history. We're not talking about mythical people and mythical places, like Harry Potter and Hogwarts or Santa Claus and the north pole, or the Hobbits and Middle Earth. In Genesis, we're talking about the real world. And in the real world, every name matters to God, because every person matters to God, and every place matters to God.

The growing list of Noah's descendants will eventually lead us to the birth of Abraham in Chapter 11 and God's call to him in chapter 12. But before we get to the call of Abraham, we learn that God has numbered, charted, and catalogued with meticulous detail, all the peoples of the earth.

<u>God knows in great detail every nation that makes up the world, and he knows in great detail every individual who is part of each nation.</u>

<u>Psalm 139:1-4</u>

1 You have searched me, Lord,
and you know me.
2 You know when I sit and when I rise;
you perceive my thoughts from afar.
3 You discern my going out and my lying down;
you are familiar with all my ways.
4 Before a word is on my tongue
you, Lord, know it completely.
5 You hem me in behind and before,
and you lay your hand upon me.
6 Such knowledge is too wonderful for me,
too lofty for me to attain.

For the Psalmist it was wonderful to realize God knew him that intimately.

How does it make you feel to know that God knows you this intimately?

The answer probably depends on what your relationship with God is like at the moment.

If you are a child of God and are walking closely with him, then it can be comforting to know that the Lord knows every detail of your life, even down to the number of hairs on your head (Luke 12:7). He knows every struggle you are going through. He knows every heart ache. He knows every disappointment and unfulfilled longing in your heart. He knows every mistake you have ever made and he loves you anyway.

You can turn to Him for comfort, support, peace and help in the difficulties of life. You can even turn to him for forgiveness when you mess up. You have his assurance that He will forgive you. That He will be with you whatever you are facing and wherever you go for he has promised to never leave you or forsake you. You know he cares for you. He loves you deeply. If you have a relationship with God, it is comforting to know that He knows every detail of your life.

But if you have not come into a saving relationship with the One true God, then it might be uncomfortable or even frightening to hear the truth that God knows everything there is to know about you. There might be things you wish he didn't know about you or that you could hide from him.

Psalm 139 makes clear that God is everywhere and sees even the secret things:

7 Where can I go from your Spirit?
Where can I flee from your presence?
8 If I go up to the heavens, you are there;
if I make my bed in the depths, you are there.
9 If I rise on the wings of the dawn,
if I settle on the far side of the sea,
10 even there your hand will guide me,
your right hand will hold me fast.
11 If I say, "Surely the darkness will hide me
and the light become night around me,"
12 even the darkness will not be dark to you;
the night will shine like the day,
for darkness is as light to you.

13 *For you created my inmost being;*
you knit me together in my mother's womb.
14 *I praise you because I am fearfully and wonderfully made;*
your works are wonderful,
I know that full well.

15 *My frame was not hidden from you*
when I was made in the secret place,
when I was woven together in the depths of the earth.
16 *Your eyes saw my unformed body;*
all the days ordained for me were written in your book
before one of them came to be.

There are no secrets we can keep from God. Nothing is hidden from his view. Even the darkness becomes light in his presence. The good, the bad and the ugly – He sees and knows it all. He sees it all. In our efforts to cover up our own wrong doing, we might deceive those around us. But we will never deceive God.

Hebrews 4:12-13 says it even more plainly:

12 *For the word of God is alive and active. Sharper than any double-edged sword, it penetrates even to dividing soul and spirit, joints and marrow; it judges the thoughts and attitudes of the heart.* ***13*** *Nothing in all creation is hidden from God's sight. Everything is uncovered and laid bare before the eyes of him to whom we must give account.*

Someday we must all give an account for our lives. We must give an account for how we have lived – whether for the glory of God, and in submission to His will, or whether for the glory of ourselves and in defiance and rebellion against God.

NIMROD

Nimrod was a man who lived for his own glory. Did you notice him in the list? He was the one who had the most written about him. Nimrod was the grandson of Ham.

Let me read you the paragraph about him again.

8 Cush was the father[c] of Nimrod, who became a mighty warrior on the earth. 9 He was
a mighty hunter before the Lord; that is why it is said, "Like Nimrod, a mighty hunter
before the Lord." 10 The first centers of his kingdom were Babylon, Uruk, Akkad and
Kalneh, in[d] Shinar.[e] 11 From that land he went to Assyria, where he built Nineveh,
Rehoboth Ir,[f] Calah 12 and Resen, which is between Nineveh and Calah—which is the
great city.

If you grew up in a hunting community to have someone say you are a good hunter would be a complement. So, on first read you might think Nimrod is being complemented for his strength and skill in hunting. Clearly he was a powerful man. But as a warrior, he would not have been a hunter of animals, but a hunter of man. A conqueror. A tyrant. A murderer[ii].

Nimrod used his strength and his skill to defy God. He is the first person the Bible speaks about with words such as kingdom or “reign”. And he set up his kingdom and his cities in opposition to God.

The first centers of his kingdom was Babylon, Uruk, Adda and Kaneh in Shinar. In the next chapter of Genesis we’ll read the story of the Tower of Babel, or Babylon, which took place in Shinar. God had commanded Noah’s descendants to fill the earth, to spread out through the earth. But Nimrod tried to gather them to build a tower that reached heaven, so that they could make a name for themselves and not be scattered over the earth.

That Nimrod did all this “before the Lord” suggests that he was aware of God’s presence and God’s command but acted in bold defiance of God’s authority. His arrogance and rebellion against God are set here as a warning against human ambition, pride and rebellion as one tries to seek glory apart from God.

We’ll see next time that though God took note of Nimrod’s rebellion, Nimrod was no threat to God, nor could he thwart God’s purposes. God came down and confused the people’s languages so that they scattered over the earth, in obedience to his mandate.

Psalm 2:4 tells us that

1 Why do the nations conspire[a]
and the peoples plot in vain?
2 The kings of the earth rise up
and the rulers band together
against the Lord and against his anointed, saying,
3 “Let us break their chains
and throw off their shackles.”
4 The One enthroned in heaven laughs;
the Lord scoffs at them.
5 He rebukes them in his anger
and terrifies them in his wrath, saying,
6 “I have installed my king
on Zion, my holy mountain.”

God laughs at the plans of those who would defy him in arrogance.

Proverbs 19:21 Many are the plans in a man’s heart but it is the Lord’s purposes that prevail.

Where in your life are you trying to build a name for yourself instead of a name for God? Where are you pursuing selfish ambition and vain glory?
We were created to worship God and glorify his name.
If we focus on trying to build our own name, we are working in opposition to the purposes of God.

That's why the scripture says, "God opposes the proud but gives grace to the humble." (Prov 3:34 and James 4:6).

No human being and no human kingdom is a threat to God. He just laughs at the schemes we come up.

But one day we will have to give an account to him for how we have lived. What will that account of your life look like? God sees what you are doing, even now, just as He saw what Nimrod was doing. It might look impressive on the outside, but is it done in obedience to the will of God? If not, it won't last.

God is building His kingdom on this earth even now. He invites men and women everywhere to be part of it. He is seeking humble men and women who will live in relationship with Him and learn to walk in His ways. Have you come into the Kingdom of God, or are you still living as part of one of the Kingdoms of this world?

As we end today, there is one more name I need to point out to you, because it reveals the beginnings of God's plan to redeem people from every nation, tribe, people and language.

You might have missed this name, because there wasn't as much said about him as was said about Nimrod, so it would be easy to gloss over him. But more important in revealing God's purposes than Nimrod is the name Eber in our table of nations.

In Genesis 10:21 we're told that Shem was the ancestor of all the sons of Eber. This name became the base for the word "Hebrew." Abraham would descend from Eber and Abraham became the father of the Hebrew people.

Out of all the peoples of the earth, God would call Abraham, to be a blessing, to be a light to the nations (Isa 49:6). From his line would come the promised offspring to crush the serpent's head. When God called Abraham it was so that all the peoples of the earth would be blessed (Genesis 12:3). So here in the listing of the name of Eber, we see God beginning to reveal his plan to restore his blessing on the people of the world through a descendant of this table of nations.

We celebrate that descendant ever Christmas. His name is Jesus. When we remember the coming of Jesus' into the world at Christmas, we are linking back to the promises God gave at the very beginning. Jesus is a descendant of this table of nations, through the line of Eber.

"Wait a sec!" you might be thinking. "Isn't it a little early to be talking about Christmas?"

If you've been to Costco, they don't think so. They already have the Christmas stuff out. It's never too early for Costco to make a buck. But God has them beat.

While Costco is advertising Christmas a few months early, the Lord God first began talking about Christmas, thousands of years before it ever came to be, way back in the garden of Eden, when He promised to send a deliverer to crush the head of the serpent.

Jesus, in his earthy life and ministry, at one point sent out seventy disciples ahead of him into every town and village where he was about to go to preach the gospel. (Luke 10). This was a symbolic reclaiming of every nation that had scattered and spread throughout the earth in Genesis 10. As Noah's descendants spread across the earth in obedience to God's mandate to fill the earth, now the 70 disciples go ahead of Jesus in obedience to His command, symbolizing the spread of the gospel to all nations. There is continuity in God's redemptive plan for all of humanity[iii].

Interesting side note…If you remember how I said in the beginning that most translations say there were 70 nations in Genesis 10, but a few say 72. Well, as it turns out, some translations say Jesus sent out 70 disciples ahead of him in Luke 10 and other translations say it was 72. So, whichever way you cut it God has it covered. The bottom line is that Jesus wants to reach people from every nation with the good news of his saving grace.

And the symbolism here is that Jesus is reclaiming the nations through the gospel. There is no nation that is beyond his love and his care and his desire to see come into relationship with him.

And so in Revelation 7:9 we see the final picture. A great multitude standing before the throne of the Lamb, so big that no one can count. In the multitude are people from every tongue, tribe and nation, before the throne of God.

As we see an accounting of the nations in Genesis 10 we now see them all coming before the throne of God in Revelation 7 in the end.

What does this Table of Nations tell us about God?

1. God knows every individual and every nation on earth – He knows everything ever person and every nation does, whether good or bad. Whether to build his kingdom or whether to build their own.

2. God loves the nations and the people they represent. Most of the people and the nations listed in Genesis 10 turned away from God and rebelled against him. Many people in the world today do that too. And yet, he doesn't give up on us. He still loved them and he still loves us.

3. That's why he began to unveil his plan to send a redeemer to save every people from every nation, tribe, people and language (Rev 7:9)

Conclusion

I have one final AI created image to show you today. [Show final image.] The heart of God is for every nation on earth. And I happen to think that AI put 70 flags on this image. Pretty cool

God loves the nations. He loves them so much that he carefully documented each one by name, keeping a careful record of them all. And his plan is that at the end of time, there will be people from every tongue, tribe, people and nation, standing around his throne, in relationship to him and in worship.

What will your part be in that plan? Will you be part of that group worshipping around the throne? Will you be part of spreading the gospel so that others can come and be part of that multitude as well?

One way you can do that is simply to pray. On Sunday mornings when we have people come up and pray, we often include prayers for the nations around the world. Will you pray for the nations at home? For the light of God's truth to shine in. For people to go out and to share his truth. And maybe God will use you even here too. As God brings the nations to us.

A few weeks ago we had a family that visited us from Indonesia. They were bringing their son to the US to attend college at DeAnza.

The next week we had a family visit us from Madagascar. They also had a son who was going to be attending college at DeAnza.

God brings people from other nations to us. What will we do with that? How will we respond? As a church and as individuals, we have a part to play.

Let's pray. God, thank you that you know us each by name. Thank you for moving in the world to bring your purposes to fruition. Thank you for your desire to be in relationship with people from every tongue, tribe and nation. Thank you for bringing the nations to us. Help us Lord to know how to respond. That we could be your hands and feet. That we could be part of your plans in helping people come into your kingdom. Where there are things in our life that we need to set straight, perhaps we have lived in rebellion against you, perhaps we have never come into relationship with you for the first time, would you help us learn how to do that. Help us learn what it means to surrender to you, to submit to your will and your ways. Would you glorify yourself through us. We will be careful to give you the glory and the honor and the praise for what you do. In Jesus' name, Amen.

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