

Genesis 10:5

Authorized King James Version (KJV)

By these were the isles of the Gentiles divided in their lands; every one after his tongue, after their families, in their nations.

Analysis

By these were the isles of the Gentiles divided in their lands; every one after his tongue, after th... This passage belongs to the primeval history section (Genesis 1-11) which establishes universal truths about God, humanity, sin, and divine purposes before focusing on Abraham and Israel. These chapters answer fundamental questions about human origins, the spread of wickedness, God's judgment, and the preservation of a righteous remnant.

Recurring patterns emerge: human sin escalating from individual disobedience to societal corruption, divine patience followed by judgment, gracious preservation of a remnant, and covenant promises ensuring redemptive purposes continue. The genealogies connect historical persons, demonstrate the fulfillment of divine promises (blessing and multiplication), and trace the line leading to Abraham and ultimately Christ.

Key theological themes in this section include:

1. sin's destructive progression affecting all humanity
2. God's righteous judgment while preserving mercy
3. human pride and autonomy opposing divine sovereignty
4. cultural development as both blessing and potential idolatry
5. God's sovereign plan advancing despite human rebellion.

These narratives provide the necessary context for understanding God's calling of Abraham and the covenant promises through which all nations will be blessed.

Historical Context

The primeval history (Genesis 1-11) parallels ancient Near Eastern traditions including Sumerian King Lists (pre-flood longevity), Akkadian flood traditions (Atrahasis, Gilgamesh), and Mesopotamian city foundation myths. However, Genesis demythologizes these traditions, presenting monotheistic history rather than polytheistic mythology. The genealogies connecting Adam to Noah to Abraham provide historical framework absent in pagan myths.

Archaeological evidence confirms ancient urbanization (chapter 4's cities), agricultural development, metallurgy, and musical instruments emerging in Mesopotamia's early history. The Babel account reflects Mesopotamian ziggurat construction (stepped pyramid temples), particularly in Babylon. Linguistic diversity requiring explanation was obvious to ancient peoples, making the Babel narrative culturally relevant.

For Israel in covenant with Yahweh, these chapters explained their relationship to surrounding nations. All peoples descended from Noah, but Israel descended from Shem through Abraham—chosen for blessing all nations. The flood demonstrated God's justice and mercy: judging wickedness while preserving the righteous. This pattern would recur throughout Israel's history, assuring them that God's covenant faithfulness endures despite judgment on the wicked.

Related Passages

Ephesians 2:8 — Salvation by grace through faith

Romans 10:9 — Confession and belief for salvation

James 2:17 — Faith and works

Hebrews 11:1 — Definition of faith

Study Questions

1. What does this passage reveal about God's sovereignty and human responsibility?
2. What obstacles prevent us from living out the truths presented in this verse?
3. How does this verse fit into the broader biblical story culminating in Christ?

Interlinear Text

וְיָ אֱלֹהִים	נִפְרָד וְ	אֵי י	בְּגוֹיֵיהֶם:	בְּאַרְצֵתָם
H428	divided in	By these were the isles	in their nations	their lands
	H6504	H339	H1471	H776
אֵשׁ	לְלִשְׁנוֹ	לְמִשְׁפְּחוֹתָם	בְּגוֹיֵיהֶם:	
every one	after his tongue	after their families	in their nations	
H376	H3956	H4940	H1471	

Additional Cross-References

Zephaniah 2:11 (Parallel theme): The LORD will be terrible unto them: for he will famish all the gods of the earth; and men shall worship him, every one from his place, even all the isles of the heathen.

Jeremiah 2:10 (Parallel theme): For pass over the isles of Chittim, and see; and send unto Kedar, and consider diligently, and see if there be such a thing.

Jeremiah 25:22 (Parallel theme): And all the kings of Tyrus, and all the kings of Zidon, and the kings of the isles which are beyond the sea,

Isaiah 42:4 (Parallel theme): He shall not fail nor be discouraged, till he have set judgment in the earth: and the isles shall wait for his law.

Genesis 10:20 (Parallel theme): These are the sons of Ham, after their families, after their tongues, in their countries, and in their nations.