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The Sons of Ham

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Noah had three sons—Shem, Ham, and Japheth. Their descendants ultimately populated the world, and everyone alive today has a lineage that goes back to one of these three sons. Genesis 10 records the Table of Nations that lists the immediate descendants of Noah's sons including the four sons of Ham—Cush, Mizraim, Put, and Canaan (Genesis 10:6-20; compare 1 Chronicles 1:8-16). “As the second son of Noah, Ham is regarded as the eponymous ancestor of the African peoples, as Japheth his brother is of the Indo-Europeans, and Shem of the Semites.”¹ The historical tie between the biblical record and other ancient writings supports the accuracy of the Bible in all matters including history and faith.

Cush and his Sons

Genesis 10:6 lists Cush first among the sons of Ham. “Traditionally Cush has been translated ‘Ethiopia’ following the usage of the ancient Greeks. The territory would better be designated as Nubia, the region south of the First Cataract of the Nile”² However, the Cushites cannot be limited to Africa. “In Genesis 2:13 and 10:8, the reference is to an earlier Asiatic (Mesopotamian) Cush, probably the Kassites (Cossaeans).”³ In fact, some of the descendants of Cush likely settled in Mesopotamia and Arabia as well as Ethiopia. Moses married a Cushite (Numbers 12:1).

Genesis 10:7 lists the sons of Cush as Seba, Havilah, Sabtah, Raamah, and Sabteca. Little is known about the descendants of Seba (not to be confused with Sheba, the descendant of Shem) and Havilah (not to be confused with the descendant of Shem by the same name), although they may have settled in Arabia,⁴ possibly near the Red Sea.⁵ Likewise, the precise locations of the tribes of Sabtah, Raamah, and Sabteca are uncertain although they are also connected with the Arabian Peninsula.⁶ Raamah's sons, Sheba and Dedan, also seem to be associated with Arabia. “Sheba was the land of the Sabaeans in Yemen, also mentioned in the genealogy of Shem, and Dedan, a people of northwestern Arabia along the Red Sea.”⁷ In addition to the five sons of Cush, Genesis 10:8-12 describes another descendant of Cush, Nimrod, who established powerful city states in Mesopotamia.

Mizraim and his Sons

Mizraim was the second son of Ham and his name is the usual Hebrew term for Egypt. Mizraim and his descendants would have settled in Egypt and the surrounding regions. Genesis 10:13 identifies seven tribal descendants of Mizraim. Little is known about the Ludites (distinct from the descendants of Lud, the son of Shem) or Anamites. The Lehabites might be the ancestors of the Libyans who settled along the Mediterranean Sea west of Egypt.⁸ The Naphtuhites may have settled in the northern Delta region of Egypt,⁹ and the Pathrusites may be associated with the people of southern, or upper, Egypt (compare Jeremiah 44:15; Ezekiel 29:14).¹⁰ The Casluhites are obscure, although Genesis 10:14 associates them with the Philistines who settled in the land of Canaan. Finally, the Caphtorites are “usually identified with the island of Crete, known as *Keftiu* in Egyptian sources.”¹¹ Amos 9:7 describes a link between Caphtor and the Philistines, thereby supporting the close relationship between the Casluhites and the Caphtorites as sons of Mizraim.

The Descendants of Put

Genesis 10 simply lists Put, or Phut, as a son of Ham but gives no further information. While it's possible to identify Put with ancient Punt in East African Somalia, a better identification connects Put with the land west of Egypt. “Phut occurs as Put(a) in the

inscriptions of the Persian Monarch Darius I the Great (522-486 B.C.), and its location in Cyrenaica, the region about Cyrene in North Africa west of Egypt, is now certain.”¹²

Canaan and his Sons

The last son of Ham was Canaan. Canaan fell under a curse issued by his grandfather Noah, consigning many of Canaan’s descendants to slavery (Genesis 9:25-27). Genesis 10:15-18 identifies eleven descendant tribes of Canaan, most of which migrated to the land of Canaan and its surrounding regions. The land of Canaan, or the Promised Land, eventually became the dwelling place of the Israelites.

The Sidonians settled in Phoenicia along the coast of the Mediterranean Sea north of Israel. The Phoenician city of Sidon maintained this name and the family connection.

The Hittites originally settled north of Phoenicia in central Asia Minor. Early on, some of the Hittites migrated south into the land of Canaan.¹³

The Jebusites were associated with the region right around Jerusalem. In fact, Jerusalem was originally called Jebus (Judges 19:10), and David defeated the Jebusites when he made Jerusalem his capital (2 Samuel 5:6-7).

The Amorites were a “powerful race in Palestine, holding the hill country of Judah, where they had five kings (Josh. 10:5) and a large district on the eastern side of the Jordan (Deut. 3:8; Judg. 11:22).”¹⁴

The Girgashites were a tribe that settled in the land of Canaan, but little more is known about them.

The Hivites lived in the land of Canaan during the patriarchal period (Genesis 33:18), the period of the Conquest (Joshua 9:1), and the time of the kingdom of Solomon (1 Kings 9:20-22). They are sometimes associated with the ancient Horites.¹⁵

The Arkites “were inhabitants of the Phoenician city of Arqa, twelve and one-half miles north of Tripolis at the northwestern foot of the Lebanon.”¹⁶

The Sinites also lived in the region of Phoenicia and are mentioned in the annals of the Assyrian ruler Tiglath-Pileser III.¹⁷

The Arvadites were identified with the northern Phoenician city of Arvad, which successfully resisted the attacks of Pharaoh Thutmose III.¹⁸

The Zemarites were “the people of the city fortress of Simura (Simuros) six miles south of Arvad, a place also mentioned very frequently in the Amarna correspondence as Sumur.”¹⁹

The Hamathites are identified with the city of Hamath on the Orontes River in Syria, and served as the northernmost border of Israel during David’s reign.²⁰

The historical connection between many of the names of Ham’s descendants and ancient records underscores the accuracy of the Bible and its message.

¹ Unger, Merrill F. *Archaeology and the Old Testament*. Grand Rapids, MI: Zondervan Publishing House, 1954, p. 83.

² Pfeiffer, Charles F. *Baker’s Bible Atlas*. Revised Edition. Grand Rapids, MI: Baker Book House, 1973, p. 40.

³ Unger, Merrill F. *Unger’s Bible Dictionary*. Third Edition. Chicago: Moody Press, 1975, p. 231.

⁴ Davis, John J. *Paradise to Prison*. Grand Rapids, MI: Baker Book House, 1975, p. 142.

⁵ Unger, *Archaeology*, p. 85.

⁶ Pfeiffer, p. 41.

⁷ Pfeiffer, p. 41.

⁸ Pfeiffer, p. 41.

⁹ Pfeiffer, p. 41.

¹⁰ Pfeiffer, p. 41.

¹¹ Pfeiffer, p. 42.

¹² Unger, *Archaeology*, p. 84.

¹³ Pfeiffer, p. 42.

¹⁴ Unger, *Archaeology*, p. 93.

¹⁵ Pfeiffer, p. 42-43.

¹⁶ Pfeiffer, p. 43.

¹⁷ Pfeiffer, p. 43.

¹⁸ Pfeiffer, p. 43.

¹⁹ Unger, *Archaeology*, p. 94.

²⁰ Pfeiffer, p. 43.