

# Genesis 10:21-24

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*Shem had five sons. Aram was the father of four sons. Arpachshad was the grandfather of Eber and an ancestor of Abraham.*

Although Shem is mentioned first in [Genesis 10:1](#), his descendants are mentioned last in the table of nations perhaps because of his lineage connecting to Abram the line of the chosen or elect. Shem (Noah's first-born son) lived from ninety-eight years before the flood until hundred and fifty years after the birth of Abraham ([Genesis 11:10](#)). *Also to Shem, the father of all the children of Eber, and the older brother of Japheth, children were born. The sons of Shem were Elam and Asshur and Arpachshad and Lud and Aram.* The descendants of Shem (Shemites) included Jews, Assyrians, Syrians, Arabs, Samaritans, Elamites, Arameans, Ammonites, Moabites, Midianites, and Edomites. They settled in the upper Euphrates Valley, eastern Mesopotamia, and north Syria, in the middle between Japheth and Ham's descendants (today's Middle Eastern countries, Iraq, Iran, and Syria North of the Persian Gulf). They became known as the Semites or Semitic people. From them originated the world's three great monotheistic religions: the Jewish, Muslim and Christian. The descendants of Shem ([Genesis 10:21–31](#)) are especially important because they include the forefathers of Israel (God's chosen people). Abraham comes from the line of Shem. Therefore, Abraham is a Shemite or Semite. The Shemites comprise two groups of thirteen peoples each.

**Descendants of Eber:** Eber is a fourth generation from Shem, therefore Shem is Eber's great-grandfather. The word "father" here means forefather or ancestor. He is the ancestor both of Israel and of significant peoples in Israelite history. These include Arameans, Ammonites, Moabites, Midianites, the Ishmaelite tribes, and Edomites. One would expect these descendants of Eber to be called "Hebrews." The word "Hebrew" is derived from the name of an ancestor, in this case, Eber or Heber. The word *Hebrew* first appears in [Genesis 14:13](#), where Abram is called "the Hebrew." The name Eber means *to pass through or cross over*. Two examples are an attacking army that passes through its enemies' territories conquering them like a flood

(. [Joshua 18:9](#); [Isaiah 8:8](#); [Daniel 11:10](#), [40](#)) and the literal flood waters of Noah's day passing over the earth. The noun Hebrew is an ethnic term meaning a Hebrew person or a person from beyond the Euphrates River.

*Shem* had five sons:

**Elam** was a son of Shem. He settled in a land known as Persia located in the mountainous region east of the Tigris-Euphrates Valley. Elam is the ancient name for modern Khuzistan in southwestern Iran in the Iranian Plateau east of Babylon and northeast of the Persian Gulf. Its capital was Susa, the biblical Shushan of [Esther 1:2–5](#) (see also [Daniel 8:2](#)). Elam is the most easterly country in the Table of Nations. The king of Elam was among the coalition of eastern kings whom Abraham defeated ([Genesis 14:1,9](#)). From the later third millennium B.C., Semites lived in Elam. Chedorlaomer ([Genesis 14:1,9](#)) was king of Elam, and in later times Assyrians deported Israelites to Elam ([Ezra 4:9](#); [Isaiah 11:11](#)).

**Asshur** was a son of Shem. His descendants became the Assyrians to the North West ([Numbers 24:22,24](#); [Ezekiel 27:23](#)). The city of Asshur on the upper Tigris river in northern Mesopotamia (modern Iraq) gave its name to the surrounding territory, which became known as Assyria. Other principal cities of Assyria were Nineveh and Calah. Asshur-uballit I (ca. 1356–1321 B.C.) was the first monarch to be called "king of the land of Assyria."

**Arpachshad or Arphaxad** was the third son of Shem. He settled to the west. His descendants could be the Chaldeans. This was the name of a seminomadic Aramean tribe that lived in the desert regions between northern Arabia and the Persian Gulf. It was first applied to the southern part of Mesopotamia but was eventually used for all of Babylonia. Arpachshad is listed in the lineage from Adam to Jesus ([Numbers 1:17-24](#); [Luke 3:36](#)).

**Lud** was a son of Shem. His ancestors are related to the Lydians near the Tigris River west of Asia Minor and north-west of Assyria ([Isaiah 66:19](#); [Ezekiel 27:10](#)).

**Aram** was a son of Shem. His peoples became the Arameans and lived in the Mesopotamian plains, the northeast corner of Canaan (south of Lud and west of Assyria). They were probably associated with a settlement in the eastern Tigris region, north of Elam and east of Assyria, called Aramu. The Greeks called this Syria. The Arameans migrated from Kir, which would place them in the northeastern part of the Fertile Crescent ([Isaiah 22:6](#) [Amos 9:7](#)). Jacob

was called a “wandering Aramean” ([Deuteronomy 26:5](#)). The name “Aram” also occurs in the genealogy of Nahor, brother of Abraham ([Genesis 22:21](#)). Their language was called Aramaic and was easier than Akkadian or Hebrew which made their culture popular. Jesus spoke some things in Aramaic recorded in the New Testament ([Mark 5:41,15:34](#); [Matthew 27:46](#)). They worshiped Baal and had frequent conflicts with Israel.

*The sons of Aram were Uz and Hul and Gether and Mash. Arpachshad became the father of Shelah; and Shelah became the father of Eber. Aram had four sons:*

**Uz** was the firstborn of Aram and a grandson of Shem. His peoples became Aramean, settling northeast of the Jordan River near Hauran and Damascus.

**Hul** was a son of Aram and great-grandson of Adam ([1 Chronicles 1:17](#)). He settled in Armenia near the Sea of Galilee. The early church father, Josephus, locates Hul in Armenia.

**Gether** was a son of Aram. His descendants became Syrians and lived in Mesopotamia to the NE. of Israel.

**Mash** was a son of Aram. He settled in northern Mesopotamia (Tur Abdin) near the mountains of Lebanon, especially Mount Masius, west of Babylonia. Possibly known as the “Masa,” located in central Asia Minor and known from Hittite texts.

*Arpachshad* had one son:

**Shelah** was the son of Arpachshad and settled northeast of Nineveh. At the age of thirty, he became the father of Eber ([Genesis 11:12-15](#); [1 Chronicles 2:3, 4:21](#)). Shelah is listed in the genealogy of the Gospel of Luke leading from Jesus to Adam ([Luke 3:35](#)). He lived in some part of Babylonia. He is found among the families of Judah ([Genesis 38:5,11,14,26, 46:12](#); [Numbers 26:20](#); [1 Chronicles 2:3; 4:21–23](#)).

*Shelah* had one son:

**Eber** was the son of Shelah and Shem’s great-grandson. He lived in Ur of the Chaldees. He was an ancestor of Abraham and the Hebrews. Eber appears in the genealogy of Luke’s Gospel leading from Jesus and Joseph back to Adam.

## Biblical Text

<sup>21</sup> Also to Shem, the father of all the children of Eber, *and* the older brother of Japheth, children were born. <sup>22</sup> The sons of Shem *were* Elam and Asshur and Arpachshad and Lud and Aram. <sup>23</sup> The sons of Aram *were* Uz and Hul and Gether and Mash. <sup>24</sup> Arpachshad became the father of Shelah; and Shelah became the father of Eber.