

Genesis 10 – 11 Bible Study

The Table of Nations

The Table of Nations is a summary of the people groups that popped up across the globe after Noah and his family came out of the ark. It doesn't list every single people group but focuses on the nation of Israel: their people and their enemies. So, with that in mind, let's take a look at the Table of Nations. As you read, highlight each of the three sons of Noah: Shem, Ham and Japheth.

Genesis 10: “This is the account of Noah’s sons Shem, Ham, and Japheth. Sons were born to them after the flood.

The sons of Japheth were Gomer, Magog, Madai, Javan, Tubal, Meshech, and Tiras. The sons of Gomer were Askenaz, Riphath, and Togarmah. The sons of Javan were Elishah, Tarshish, the Kittim, and the Dodanim. From these the coastlands of the nations were separated into their lands, every one according to its language, according to their families, by their nations.

The sons of Ham were Cush, Mizraim, Put, and Canaan. The sons of Cush were Seba, Havilah, Sabtah, Raamah, and Sabteca. The sons of Raamah were Sheba and Dedan. Cush was the father of Nimrod; he began to be a valiant warrior on the earth. He was a mighty hunter before the Lord. (That is why it is said, “Like Nimrod, a mighty hunter before the Lord.”) The primary regions of his kingdom were Babel, Erech, Akkad, and Calneh in the land of Shinar. From that land he went to Assyria, where he built Nineveh, Rehoboth-Ir, Calah, and Resen, which is between Nineveh and the great city Calah. Mizraim was the father of the Ludites, Anamites, Lehabites, Naphtuhites, Pathrusites, Casluhites (from whom the Philistines came), and Caphtorites. Canaan was the father of Sidon his firstborn, Heth, the Jebusites, Amorites, Girgashites, Hivites, Arkites, Sinites, Arvadites, Zemarites, and Hamathites. Eventually the families of the Canaanites were scattered and the borders of Canaan extended from Sidon all the way to Gerar as far as Gaza, and all the way to Sodom, Gomorrah, Admah, and Zeboiim, as far as Lasha. These are the sons of Ham, according to their families, according to their languages, by their lands, and by their nations.

And sons were also born to Shem (the older brother of Japheth), the father of all the sons of Eber. The sons of Shem were Elam, Asshur, Arphaxad, Lud, and Aram. The sons of Aram were Uz, Hul, Gether, and Mash. Arphaxad was the father of Shelah, and Shelah was the father of Eber. Two sons were born to Eber: One was named Peleg because in his days the earth was divided, and his brother's name was Joktan. Joktan was the father of Almodad, Sheleph, Hazarmaveth, Jerah, Hadoram, Uzal, Diklah, Obal, Abimael, Sheba, Ophir, Havilah, and Jobab. All these were sons of Joktan. Their dwelling place was from Mesha all the way to Sephar in the eastern hills. These are the sons of Shem according to their families, according to their languages, by their lands, and according to their nations. These are the families of the sons of Noah, according to their genealogies, by their nations, and from these the nations spread over the earth after the flood." (Genesis 10:1–32, NET)

In what order are the sons described?

Why do you think it would go in this order?

According to Genesis 9:22-24, who was the youngest son of Noah? *"Ham, the father of Canaan, saw his father's nakedness and told his two brothers who were outside. Shem and Japheth took the garment and placed it on their shoulders. Then they walked in backwards and covered up their father's nakedness. Their faces were turned the other way, so they did not see their father's nakedness. When Noah awoke from his drunken stupor, he learned what his youngest son had done to him."* (Genesis 9:22–24)

According to 10:21 who was older? Shem or Japheth? *"And sons were also born to Shem (the older brother of Japheth), the father of all the sons of Eber."*

Knowing this, what would you say was the birth order of Noah's sons?

In Genesis 10 we have the lineage of the sons of Noah starting with the middle son Japheth. It seems like an odd place to start. Why wouldn't scripture start with the oldest son first? Just like we save the best for last at dinner time, meat and potatoes, then dessert, the Bible, especially in this passage, saves the best for last in describing the sons of Noah. Shem and Ham are saved for last because their lineage is most important to the Nation of Israel.

How many sons does Japheth have?

How many grandsons?

The fourteen names of Japheth's children (seven sons and seven grandsons) begin the table of seventy names. The number seven is seen all over scripture. God rested on the seventh day. Each week has seven days. Pharaoh dreamt of seven fat oxen and seven lean oxen. The list could go on. Some say that seven is a symbol of perfection and of rest. No matter, it is still a thing of beauty to see the order in God's creation.

Take a look at verse 10:5: “*(From these the maritime peoples spread out into their territories by their clans within their nations, each with its own language.)*”

What does this passage tell us about the descendants of Japheth?

As we move on to Genesis 10:6, we see the lineage of Ham, the youngest son of Noah. In this list you will find the origin of the enemies of Israel. Do you remember from Genesis 9:24-25 why this would be the case?

“When Noah awoke from his drunken stupor, he learned what his youngest son had done to him. So, he said, “Cursed be Canaan! The lowest of slaves he will be to his brothers.”” (Genesis 9:24–25)

It would make sense that the cursed son would be the father of the enemies of Israel doesn't it? Next, Genesis 10:8 -11 lists some of the descendants of Ham. Take a look at the list and see if you recognize any of the names from other passages of scripture.

What do we learn about Nimrod in 10:8-9?

What does the fact that he is described as a warrior suggest about how he gained all the kingdoms listed after his name?

Nimrod is listed as the founder of Babel. This should tell us a bit about his character as we read about the tower that was built in his city in chapter 11.

Next in the line of Noah, we hear about the descendants of Shem starting in 10:21 and then again it is repeated starting in 11:10. What is the difference between the two? Why do you think Shem's line would be written about twice in this short span of text?

If you look closer you will notice that the descendants of Peleg are not listed in chapter 10, but they are listed in chapter 11. Again, thinking of how the Bible often saves the best for last when listing descendants who in the line of Peleg is the most important to the nation of Israel? Let's take a look at the second lineage of Shem that is placed after the tower of Babel.

Genesis 11:26: "*When Terah had lived 70 years, he became the father of Abram, Nahor, and Haran.*" (Genesis 11:26)

Why do you think that there would be a lineage of Shem before we see the Tower of Babel and then again after?

If you've paid close attention, you might also be asking yourself why the lineage before the Tower of Babel says they each had their own language (vs. 10:5) when we know that God didn't give them different languages until after the Tower (vs. 11:1). Can you guess as to why that would be?

The outworking of the lineages actually occurs after the Tower of Babel, but their placement in the text before we see the story of the Tower serves a useful purpose. First, it sets up the fact that even though God destroyed creation, humanity is still evil. Second, the story of the Tower sets us up for role of Abraham who will be restoring God's blessing to the dispersed people.

Notice how, unlike the first three genealogies, the second genealogy of Shem mirrors the genealogy found in Genesis 5:6-32, which ends with: "*After Noah was 500 years old, he became the father of Shem, Ham, and Japheth.*" (Genesis 5:32)

Why do you think that this second lineage of Shem would be so much like the very first lineage found in Genesis?

Perhaps this consistency shows the orderly creation of God going back all the way to Adam, then to Noah and his three sons and then on to the line of Shem and Abraham, the Father of the Israelites. Shem's line builds an important bridge between the antediluvian (before the flood) and post-diluvian (after the flood) worlds. The continuation of the genealogy then reveals a continuum with antediluvian history.

Now let's jump back and look at the story of the Tower of Babel in 11:1:

The whole earth had **a common language** and **a common vocabulary**.

11:2 When the people moved **eastward**, they found a plain in Shinar and settled there. 11:3 Then they said to one another, “Come, let’s make bricks and bake them thoroughly.” (They had brick instead of stone and tar instead of mortar.) 11:4 Then they said, “Come, let’s build ourselves a city and a tower with its top in the heavens so that we may make a name for ourselves. Otherwise we will be scattered across the face of the entire earth.”

11:5 But the Lord came down to see the city and the tower that the people had started building. 11:6 And the Lord said, “If as one people all sharing a common language they have begun to do this, then nothing they plan to do will be beyond them. 11:7 Come, let’s go down and confuse their language so they won’t be able to understand each other.”

11:8 So the Lord **scattered them** from there across the face of the entire earth, and they stopped building the city. 11:9 That is why its name was called Babel—because there the Lord **confused the language** of the entire world, and from there the Lord scattered them across the face of the entire earth. (Genesis 11:1-19)

What differences do you see between the people we see in verses 1-2 and how they look in verse 19?

Where are the people located before they are scattered? In the north, south, east, or west?

Where were Adam and Eve sent after the garden? To get an idea, look at Genesis 3:24: “*When he drove the man out, he placed on the eastern side of the orchard in Eden angelic sentries who used the flame of a whirling sword to guard the way to the tree of life.*” (Genesis 3:24) Which directions does this suggest Adam and Eve were sent?

We see this same movement eastward also in Genesis 4:6: “*So Cain went out from the presence of the Lord and lived in the land of Nod, east of Eden.*” (Genesis 4:16)

Where did the postdiluvian people move according to 11:2? “*When the people moved eastward, they found a plain in Shinar and settled there.*” (Genesis 11:2)

There are other instances in Genesis where people went east. For more look at Lot, who went east (Gen 13:10-12) And Ishmael was also sent to live in the east (Genesis 29:1). What can we assume these movements eastward have in common?

The use of the word eastward marks separation from God in the book of Genesis. In the tower story then, we can see that the people had moved outside of God's blessing. It's no coincidence that the Babelites have much in common with Cain who traveled eastward. Cain also had the same fear as the builders of the tower.

"Then they said, "Come, let's build ourselves a city and a tower with its top in the heavens so that we may make a name for ourselves. Otherwise we will be scattered across the face of the entire earth."" (Genesis 11:4)

And Cain said, *"Look! You are driving me off the land today, and I must hide from your presence. I will be a homeless wanderer on the earth; whoever finds me will kill me."* (Genesis 4:14)

What do you see is the common fear between the two?

Later we see another thing they had in common. In Genesis 4:17, we see *"Cain was building a city, and he named the city after his son Enoch."*

The people of Babel said, *"Come, let's build ourselves a city and a tower with its top in the heavens so that we may make a name for ourselves. Otherwise we will be scattered across the face of the entire earth.""* (Genesis 11:4)

What were they both building?

Why do you think there would be so much in common between Cain and the Babelites?

What do we learn about humanity from these passages?

How does this prepare the way for a Savior?