

God's instructions to Noah were for them to replenish the earth with people and Genesis 10 describes how the descendants of Noah became the various nations known at the time of its writing. However, before they became these differing nations they attempted to rebel against God's will by dwelling together in one location and building a tower in a challenge to God's authority.

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<sup>1</sup> Now these *are* the generations of the sons of Noah, Shem, Ham, and Japheth: and unto them were sons born after the flood.

The Hebrew word for "generations" refers to "descendants" or "family." In a figurative sense it refers to a family history. This chapter describes a brief family history of Shem, Ham and Japheth after the flood as they grew into the various nations around the world in accordance with God's command that they "be fruitful and multiply" (Gen. 9:1).

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<sup>2</sup> The sons of Japheth; Gomer, and Magog, and Madai, and Javan, and Tubal, and Meshech, and Tiras.

The descendants of Japheth eventually become nations such as the Greeks, the Medes (modern day Iran) and the island of Cyprus.

**Verses 3-5:** Lists the grandsons of Japheth through his sons Gomer and Javan.

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<sup>6</sup> And the sons of Ham; Cush, and Mizraim, and Phut, and Canaan.

The descendants of Ham became nations such as the Hittites, Amorites, the Canaanites, Philistines, and the Egyptians. All of these nations eventually become adversaries of Israel.

**Verses 7-20:** Lists some descendants of Ham, including Nimrod the hunter, who apparently was the leader at the tower of Babel (vs. 8-10). These verses also mention certain cities familiar to Israel, such as Nineveh, that are eventually built by the descendants of Ham.

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<sup>21</sup> Unto Shem also, the father of all the children of Eber, the brother of Japheth the elder, even to him were children born. <sup>22</sup> The children of Shem; Elam, and Asshur, and Arphaxad, and Lud, and Aram. <sup>23</sup> And the children of Aram; Uz, and Hul, and Gether, and Mash. <sup>24</sup> And Arphaxad begat Salah; and Salah begat Eber.

These verses deal with the descendants of Shem, the third of Noah's sons in this genealogy, although he is actually the oldest ("the brother of Japheth the elder" or better translated "the elder brother of Japheth"). Shem is the ancestor of the Semitic people and is described here as the "father" (ancestor) of the children of Eber, who become the Arabic people. Other descendants of Shem are the Syrians, the Assyrians, the Persians, and the Jewish people.

**Verses 25-31:** These verses list other descendants of Shem, concluding in v. 31 with the summarizing statement: "These are the sons of Shem, after their families, after their tongues, in their lands, after their nations."

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<sup>32</sup> These are the families of the sons of Noah, after their generations, in their nations: and by these were the nations divided in the earth after the flood.

This verse is a statement summarizing the previous verses that listed the descendants of Noah as they divided into family lines descended from each son and grandson. These family lines became the various nations that populated the earth after the flood. Moses, the author of Genesis, is showing us how the descendants of Noah became the various nations known in his day.

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## Genesis 11

<sup>1</sup> And the whole earth was of one language, and of one speech.

The previous chapter described the nations that the descendants of Noah eventually formed, but chapter 11 steps back in time to give us the reason why humanity divided themselves into nations. It begins by telling us that all humanity spoke the same language. Some have suggested crazy ideas such as speculating that there was no spoken language but that people communicated by reading each other's minds. However, the fact that the Hebrew word for "language" means "*lip*" and the one for "speech" means "*utterance*" or "*words*" indicates that they communicated verbally.

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<sup>2</sup> And it came to pass, as they journeyed from the east, that they found a plain in the land of Shinar; and they dwelt there.

We are not told how long after Noah exited the ark in the mountains of Ararat that this occurs, but the descendants of Noah apparently migrated away from the mountains where the ark had come to rest. The Hebrew behind the phrase "from the east" could also easily be translated "eastward" or "toward the east." Whichever direction they came, when they discovered the plain in Shinar they decided to settle there. Being flat land, they likely found the area to be suitable for farming and building.

<sup>3</sup> And they said one to another, Go to, let us make brick, and burn them throughly. And they had brick for stone, and slime had they for mortar. <sup>4</sup> And they said, Go to, let us build us a city and a tower, whose top *may reach* unto heaven; and let us make us a name, lest we be scattered abroad upon the face of the whole earth.

**“And they said one to another”** – Moses (the author of Genesis) does not mention a leader of this group, but we get a clue of who likely was at the forefront of their rebellious plans in **Gen. 10:8-10**: “<sup>8</sup> And Cush begat Nimrod: he began to be a mighty one in the earth. <sup>9</sup> He was a mighty hunter before the LORD: wherefore it is said, Even as Nimrod the mighty hunter before the LORD. <sup>10</sup> And the beginning of his kingdom was Babel, and Erech, and Accad, and Calneh, in the land of Shinar.”

**“Go to, let us make brick, and burn them throughly. And they had brick for stone, and slime [pitch; asphalt] had they for mortar”** – They decided to start a major building project for which they needed to make bricks since stones were scarce in the area. Sun-dried bricks were used for many building projects but kiln-dried bricks were much more durable and appropriate for this project. The “slime” they used for mortar was a natural asphalt and may have been the same thing Noah used to waterproof the ark. Some commentators suggest that they may have waterproofed their tower to protect it from another flood, indicating that they did not trust God’s promise to never destroy the earth again with a global flood.

**“And they said, Go to, let us build us a city and a tower, whose top *may reach* unto heaven”** – They wanted to build a city as a center of government and a tower that could be seen from a distance. They likely did not intend for the tower to literally reach heaven since building it on a plain rather than a mountain would have them starting at a disadvantage. To say the tower would reach into heaven might be like us calling tall buildings “skyscrapers” even though their height falls woefully short. Throughout human history “high places” are associated with idolatry and so this tower may have been the beginning of idolatrous worship.

**“and let us make us a name”** – We see the motivation for this building project as man seeks to lift himself up in pride. The tower reaching unto heaven may have been their attempt to make themselves equal with God and therefore not obliged to obey Him.

**“lest we be scattered abroad upon the face of the whole earth”** – God had instructed them to populate the earth (Gen. 9:1) but in their pride they stubbornly refused to obey. Perhaps they subscribed to an ancient version of “united we stand, divided we fall” and wanted to be united in their rebellion against God’s commands.

<sup>5</sup> And the LORD came down to see the city and the tower, which the children of men builded.

**“And the LORD came down to see the city and the tower”** – They apparently built the tower to challenge God, and yet it was still so short that the LORD had to come down to see it. Obviously the LORD did not have to come down in order to see the city and tower; the phrase is merely expressing that the LORD had decided it was time to intervene in the situation. One commentator suggested that the LORD may have come down in human form to see what was happening firsthand.

**“which the children of men builded”** – In Hebrew the expression “children of men” is literally “sons of Adam.” The children of Adam, who was formed of the dust of the ground, were endeavoring to build this monument to their own greatness. However, God is now intervening to show them how puny they are.

<sup>6</sup> And the LORD said, Behold, the people *is* one, and they have all one language; and this they begin to do: and now nothing will be restrained from them, which they have imagined to do. <sup>7</sup> Go to, let us go down, and there confound their language, that they may not understand one another's speech.

**“And the LORD said, Behold, the people *is* one, and they have all one language”** – The LORD begins His assessment by identifying what enabled them to bond together in their rebellion: the fact that they are unified by their language.

**“and this they begin to do: and now nothing will be restrained from them, which they have imagined to do”** – Their unity allowed them to work together to build the city and tower in rebellion against God. If they were allowed to continue unchecked then there would be nothing that they wouldn’t attempt to do in further rebellion against God. Unified humanity would be moving away from God rather than toward Him.

**“Go to, let us go down, and there confound [mix; mingle; confuse] their language, that they may not understand one another's speech”** – The LORD’s solution is to break up their unity by causing the different groups within the population to suddenly speak their own unique language. Scholars believe this is the origin of the major language groups. The LORD performed an extraordinary miracle here since He had to adjust each individual’s brain to associate new vocalizations to the words they wanted to say.

<sup>8</sup> So the LORD scattered them abroad from thence upon the face of all the earth: and they left off to build the city.

Since construction requires communication and the LORD had prevented that, they had no choice but to abandon their efforts to build the city and go their separate ways. Thus the LORD compelled them to obey His command to populate the earth and the nations mentioned in Genesis 10 were then formed (**Gen. 10:5** “*By these were the isles [coasts; regions] of the Gentiles divided in their lands; every one after his tongue, after their families, in their nations.*”).

<sup>9</sup> Therefore is the name of it called Babel; because the LORD did there confound the language of all the earth: and from thence did the LORD scatter them abroad upon the face of all the earth.

**“Therefore is the name of it called Babel [confusion]; because the LORD did there confound the language of all the earth”** – The name of the city was based on the confusion that ensued after the LORD confounded their language. Babel eventually becomes the location of Babylon, the city referred to as representing the height of man’s rebellion against God in the book of Revelation.

**“and from thence did the LORD scatter them abroad upon the face of all the earth”** – The nations of the earth are formed when the various languages scatter from Babel.