

# NATIONS AND LANGUAGES

## INTRODUCTION

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- Genesis 10 marks the beginning of a new *toledoth* which explains where the nations came from

Section	Topic	Reference
I.	Book Preface: Creation Narrative	1:1–2:3
II.	The Genealogy of the Heavens and the Earth	2:4–4:26
III.	The Book of the Genealogy of Adam	5:1–6:8
IV.	The Genealogy of Noah And the Genealogy of Noah's Sons	6:9–9:29 10:1–11:9
V.	The Genealogy of Shem And the Genealogy of Terah And the Genealogy of Ishmael And the Genealogy of Isaac And the Genealogy of Esau	11:10–26 11:27–25:11 25:12–18 25:19–35:29 36:1–8; 36:9–37:1
VI.	The Genealogy of Jacob	37:2–50:26

- Although a seemingly unimportant chapter, Genesis 10 is critical in that it describes the importance of nations in God's plans and sets the scene for the coming nation, Israel, and her role to the nations
- It lists the nations as they descended from Noah's sons and grandsons, who were the progenitors of the various people groups and nations around the world
- We don't learn about the reason for the different people groups until chapter 11 (the tower of Babel), but chapter 10 describes the origin of these nations, which moved out after Babel to populate the world
- The genealogy in Genesis 10 is a segmented genealogy, which lists several people of at least the first generation and often of following generations, usually the sons of a father, the children of each son, the children in the next generation, etc...it shows the relationship between the various individuals or groups named
- This is opposed to a linear genealogy, which lists one person in each generation, usually father, son, grandson, etc and aims to show that the final person listed has a legitimate right to the position or honor the person occupies or claims...like the ones in Genesis 5 and 11
- "The table of nations is a 'horizontal' genealogy rather than a 'vertical' one...Its purpose is not primarily to trace ancestry; instead it shows political, geographical, and ethnic affiliations among tribes for various reasons, most notable being holy war. Tribes shown to be 'kin' would be in league together. Thus this table aligns the predominant tribes in and around the land promised to Israel. These names include founders of tribes, clans, cities, and territories."<sup>1</sup>
- This chapter acts as a segue to the Tower of Babel
- Notice how many times the following words occur in Genesis 10:
  - "nations" (vv. 5, 20, 31, 32)
  - "land/lands/territory" (vv. 5, 11, 19, 20, 31)
  - "kingdom" (v. 10)
  - "language" (vv. 5, 20, 31)
  - "families" (vv. 5, 18, 20, 31, 32)

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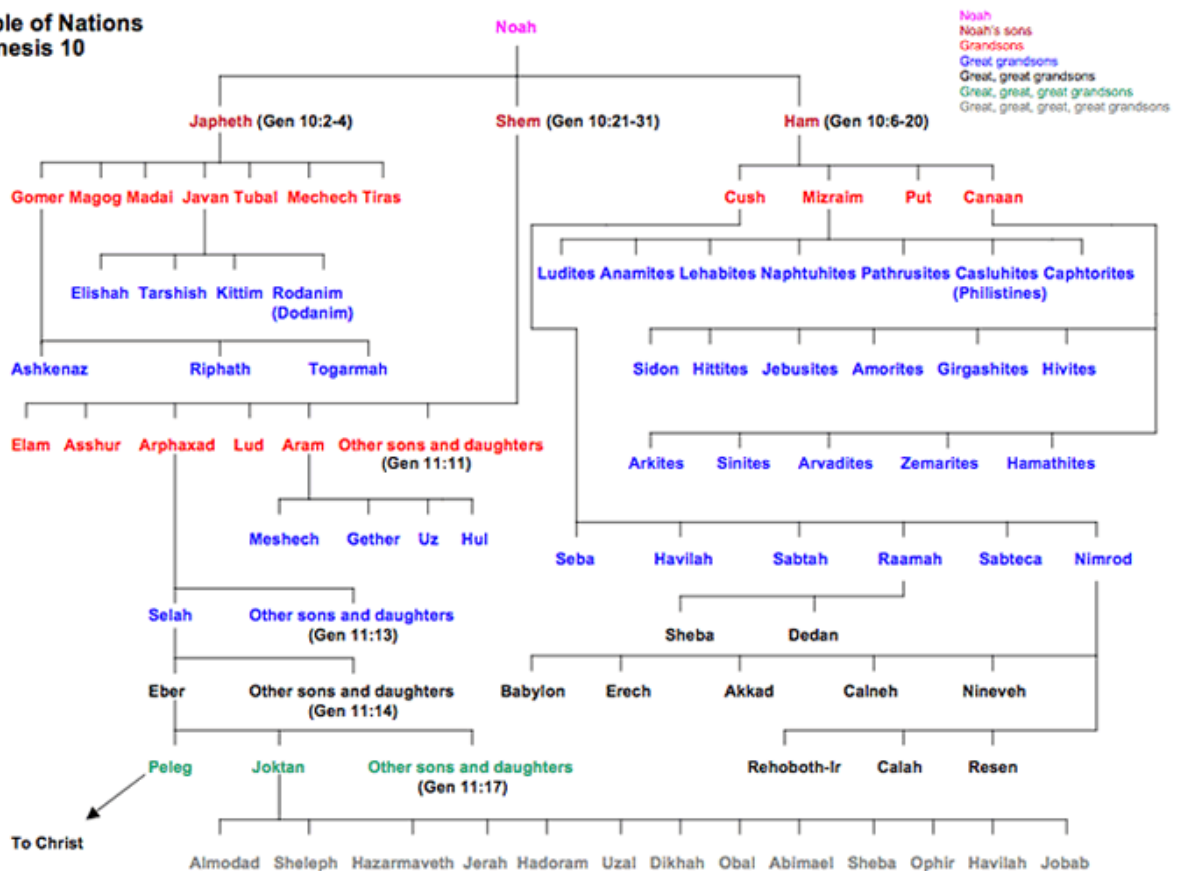
<sup>1</sup> Ross, A. P. (1985). [Genesis](#). In J. F. Walvoord & R. B. Zuck (Eds.), *The Bible Knowledge Commentary: An Exposition of the Scriptures* (Vol. 1, p. 42). Wheaton, IL: Victor Books.

- Nations are those entities that involve families, languages, and land
- These elements of nation, land, and family are echoed in the Abrahamic Covenant

**Genesis 12:1-3** ~ Now the LORD said to Abram, “Go forth from your country, And from your relatives And from your father’s house, To the **land** which I will show you; 2 And I will make you a great **nation**, And I will bless you, And make your name great; And so you shall be a blessing; 3 And I will bless those who bless you, And the one who curses you I will curse. And in you all the **families** of the earth will be blessed.”

- Specifically, the nations described in Genesis 10 are the ones that God will bless through Abraham
- The purpose of this genealogy then is to explain to Israel the relationships they would have with other peoples in ancient times
- Genesis 10 contains what has become known as the Table of Nations, a list of the patriarchal founders of 70 nations which descended from Noah through his three sons
- 14 nations come from Japheth, 30 come from Ham, and 26 come from Shem
- “There is a recurring pattern in Genesis 10 for each of Noah’s three sons. First, the sons are listed. Second, some of the grandsons are given, to explain the expansion of the nations. Third, the account ends with the settling of the clans into their nations and languages. The narrative starts with Japheth, Noah’s eldest son. Then the narrative repeats the process with Noah’s youngest son, Ham. Finally, we see the same with Shem’s sons. The order repeats a common theme in Genesis: the narrative provides the descendants of the non-seed line to dismiss it, then concentrate on the Seed line, the one leading to the Messiah. This is Shem’s line (Luke 3:36).”<sup>2</sup>

**Table of Nations  
Genesis 10**



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<sup>2</sup> Jonathan Sarfati, *The Genesis Account*, 634.

<sup>3</sup> <https://answersingenesis.org/genesis/josephus-and-genesis-chapter-ten/>

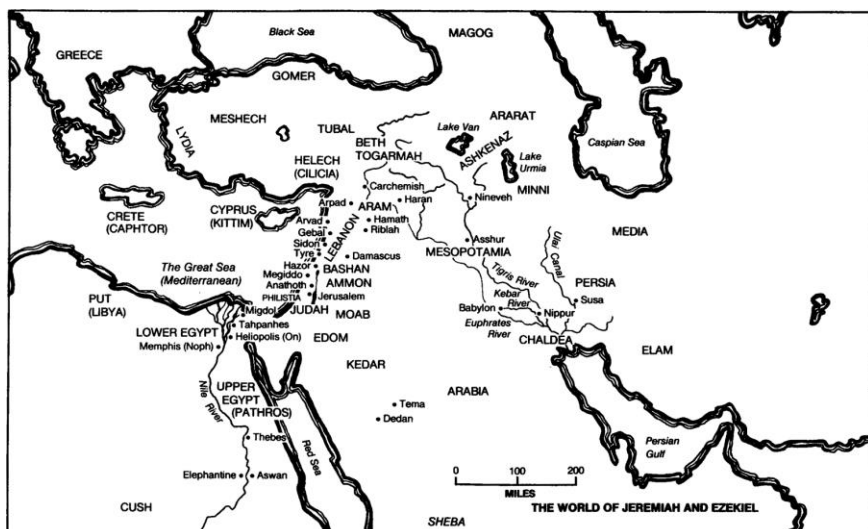
- Some of the nations listed in Genesis 10 are easily identifiable; however, some remain obscure
- Although many scholars have attempted to identify these unknown nations, there remains considerable ambiguity about their true identity
- Also, this chapter does not include an exhaustive list of every single people group on the planet
- Because Genesis was written to the nation of Israel as they were freed from slavery in Egypt, it only focuses on those peoples known to the Hebrews
- So, these names alone don't account for all of humanity as we know it today or where all of humanity lives
- According to the International Mission Board, there are now at least 11,489 people groups in the world
- Thus, nations are an important part of God's kingdom purposes (i.e. Israel, the nations in Daniel, Rev 21:24 ~ The nations will walk by its light; Ps 2:1-2 ~ why are the nations in an uproar...the kings of earth take their stand)

## NATIONS FROM THE SONS OF NOAH

### The Descendants of Japheth

**Genesis 10:1-5** ~ Now these are the records of the generations of Shem, Ham, and Japheth, the sons of Noah; and sons were born to them after the flood. 2 The sons of Japheth were Gomer and Magog and Madai and Javan and Tubal and Meshech and Tiras. 3 The sons of Gomer were Ashkenaz and Riphath and Togarmah. 4 The sons of Javan were Elishah and Tarshish, Kittim and Dodanim. 5 From these the coastlands of the nations were separated into their lands, every one according to his language, according to their families, into their nations.

- Japheth was blessed with 7 sons, more than either of his brothers
- This demonstrates the fulfilling of Noah's prophecy about Japheth in Gen 9:27 ~ May God enlarge Japheth, And let him dwell in the tents of Shem; And let Canaan be his servant.
- From his 7 sons and 7 grandsons came 14 nations
- The sons of Japheth became Israel's northern neighbors and, because of their distance away, did not figure predominantly into Israel's history



<sup>4</sup> Dyer, C. H. (1985). [Jeremiah](#). In J. F. Walvoord & R. B. Zuck (Eds.), *The Bible Knowledge Commentary: An Exposition of the Scriptures* (Vol. 1, pp. 1122–1125). Wheaton, IL: Victor Books.

- Some notable observations about Japheth's sons:

1. Gomer – modern day Armenia (east of Turkey); descendants of Gomer through his son Togarmah are mentioned in Ezekiel as coming from the far north

**Ezekiel 38:6** ~ Gomer with all its troops; Beth-togarmah from the remote parts of the north with all its troops—many peoples with you.

2. Magog – the land of Gog between Armenia and Cappadocia; they were later known as the Scythians; also described in Ezekiel 38-39; also the name of the rebel army that wages war against Christ at the end of the millennium after Satan is released

**Ezekiel 38:2** ~ Son of man, set your face toward Gog of the land of Magog, the prince of Rosh, Meshech and Tubal, and prophesy against him

**Revelation 20:7-9** ~ When the thousand years are completed, Satan will be released from his prison, 8 and will come out to deceive the nations which are in the four corners of the earth, Gog and Magog, to gather them together for the war; the number of them is like the sand of the seashore. 9 And they came up on the broad plain of the earth and surrounded the camp of the saints and the beloved city, and fire came down from heaven and devoured them.

3. Madai – probably represented the Medes east of Assyria and southwest of the Caspian Sea; later gave rise to the Medes and Persians
4. Javan – the general word for the Hellenic race, i.e. the Greeks
5. Tubal – a northern military state; possibly located in Pontus and the Armenian mountains; descendants are mentioned along with the peoples of Gog and Meshech in Ezekiel

**Ezekiel 39:1** ~ And you, son of man, prophesy against Gog and say, 'Thus says the Lord GOD, "Behold, I am against you, O Gog, prince of Rosh, Meshech and Tubal

6. Meshech – also a northern military state; possibly located in the region between the Black and Caspian Seas; also mentioned in connection with the people of Tubal in Ezekiel

Ezekiel 38:2-3 ~ Son of man, set your face toward Gog of the land of Magog, the prince of Rosh, Meshech and Tubal, and prophesy against him 3 and say, 'Thus says the Lord GOD, "Behold, I am against you, O Gog, prince of Rosh, Meshech and Tubal.

7. Tiras – inhabitants of what is now Bulgaria, west of the Black Sea

- Japheth's descendants included Gomer, Magog, Tubal, and Meshech, all nations mentioned centuries later in Ezekiel 38-39 as nations that will arise against Israel in a future war.

## The Descendants of Ham

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**Genesis 10:6-20** ~ The sons of Ham were Cush and Mizraim and Put and Canaan. 7 The sons of Cush were Seba and Havilah and Sabtah and Raamah and Sabteca; and the sons of Raamah were Sheba and Dedan. 8 Now Cush became the father of Nimrod; he became a mighty one on the earth. 9 He was a mighty hunter before the LORD; therefore it is said, "Like Nimrod a mighty hunter before the LORD." 10 The beginning of his kingdom was Babel and Erech and Accad and Calneh, in the land of Shinar. 11 From that land he went forth into Assyria, and built Nineveh and Rehoboth-Ir and Calah, 12 and Resen between Nineveh and Calah; that is the great city. 13 Mizraim became the father of Ludim and Ananim and Lehabim and Naphtuhim 14 and Pathrusim and Casluhim (from which came the Philistines) and Caphtorim. 15 Canaan became the father of Sidon, his firstborn, and Heth 16 and the Jebusite and the Amorite and the Girgashite 17 and the Hivite and the Arkite and the Sinite 18 and the Arvadite and the

Zemarite and the Hamathite; and afterward the families of the Canaanite were spread abroad. 19 The territory of the Canaanite extended from Sidon as you go toward Gerar, as far as Gaza; as you go toward Sodom and Gomorrah and Admah and Zeboiim, as far as Lasha. 20 These are the sons of Ham, according to their families, according to their languages, by their lands, by their nations.

- Ham only had 4 sons...but many of the Hamite nations are mentioned here, likely because they became Israel's opponents from the time of Moses
- Some notable observations about Ham's sons:
  1. Cush – settled in south Arabia, and in present-day southern Egypt, Sudan, and northern Ethiopia; however, the “Ethiopia” of those times doesn't correspond to the modern country of Ethiopia. It first meant all of Africa south of Egypt, but by the time of Christ it referred to the land bordering Egypt.

Some notable observations about Cush's 6 sons:

a. Nimrod

- Moses devotes 5 verses to him (vv. 8-12), not because he fathered any nations but because of his prolific activity
- He is described as “mighty” 3 times and was one of the first “mighty men” to appear on the earth after the great flood (cf. the mighty men who lived prior to the flood in Gen 6:4)
- He was a “mighty hunter” – apparently, he became famous through his hunting, which might have included some of the large dinosaurs which had disembarked from the ark
- The phrase “before the Lord” (v. 9) implies opposition to God
- “Nimrod's hunting prowess presumably gave him a large following. Nimrod also began to be a hunter of men to enslave them to his will...The Bible portrays Nimrod as the first major dictator and empire builder.”<sup>5</sup>
- He started his kingdom in the fertile land of Mesopotamia, the region between the Tigris and Euphrates rivers in modern day Iraq
- v. 10 indicates that the “beginning of his kingdom was Babel...in the land of Shinar” – his kingdom began with Babel, the site of the rebellion in Gen 11, likely evidence of his lack of faith
- Babel was the beginning of the nation of Babylon, the nation which took Israel captive and destroyed Jerusalem in 586 BC
- It is likely that Nimrod was the leader of the rebellion at the Tower of Babel, a point furthered by the fact that his name seems to be connected with the Hebrew verb “to rebel, revolt”
- The cities and nations he founded became major enemies of Israel
- Since he was the founder of the earliest imperial world powers in Babylon and Assyria, he has been identified him with tyrannical power and a prototype of Israel's enemies
- “Nimrod was obviously a skilled man and an ambitious leader. Besides being the founder of the infamous Babel and many other cities, Nimrod was a mighty man with great physical strength and great strength of will. If he was also of giant stature, then that would be another reason why the people of his time would follow him...Nimrod was undoubtedly a powerful, charismatic hero-figure of the ancient world who actually attempted to build a tower to heaven, hoping to thwart the plans of God. It isn't hard to see why so many myths and legends would spring up in the wake of such a man. In the end, however, Nimrod's power and glory came to nothing,

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<sup>5</sup> Sarfati, *Genesis Account*, 642.

because God is stronger than even the mightiest of men, and He cannot be thwarted. Nimrod was a mighty hunter before the Lord, but humility before the Lord is the posture of the wise.”<sup>6</sup>

2. Mizraim – the ancestor of the Egyptians; Egypt is sometimes referred to as the “land of Ham;”

**Psalm 105:23** ~ Israel also came into Egypt; Thus Jacob sojourned in the land of Ham.

Some notable observations about Mizraim’s 7 sons:

- a. Casluhim – this is where the Philistines, Israel’s archenemy, came from (v. 14)

3. Put – had no sons

4. Canaan – this was the son of Ham whom Noah cursed (Gen 9:25) who became the ancestor of the wide variety of Canaanite tribes

Some notable observations about Canaan’s 11 sons:

- a. Heth – connected to the Hittites

- b. The Jebusites – the inhabitants of Jerusalem before David conquered it and made it his capital

- c. The Amorites – occupied the hill country of Judah; God told Abram that their iniquity would need to run its course before he could occupy the Promised Land

**Genesis 15:16** ~ Then in the fourth generation they will return here, for the iniquity of the Amorite is not yet complete.

- d. The Girgashites – if they are the same as the Gerasenes (Mark 5), then they would have been near the Sea of Galilee

- e. The Hivites – occupied the hill country of Judah north of Jerusalem

- A significant shift occurs in vv. 16-18 away from the names of descendants to their inhabitants (i.e. the “-ite” ending)
- Ham’s descendants receive more attention likely because many of these people were the deadliest foes of Israel in the OT
- Their opposition to the people of God reflects the evil nature of their father Ham
- The description of Ham’s descendants closes with the boundaries of the Promised Land, the land the Israelites would eventually inhabit

**Genesis 10:19-20** ~ The territory of the Canaanite extended from Sidon as you go toward Gerar, as far as Gaza; as you go toward Sodom and Gomorrah and Admah and Zeboiim, as far as Lasha. 20 These are the sons of Ham, according to their families, according to their languages, by their lands, by their nations.

## The Descendants of Shem

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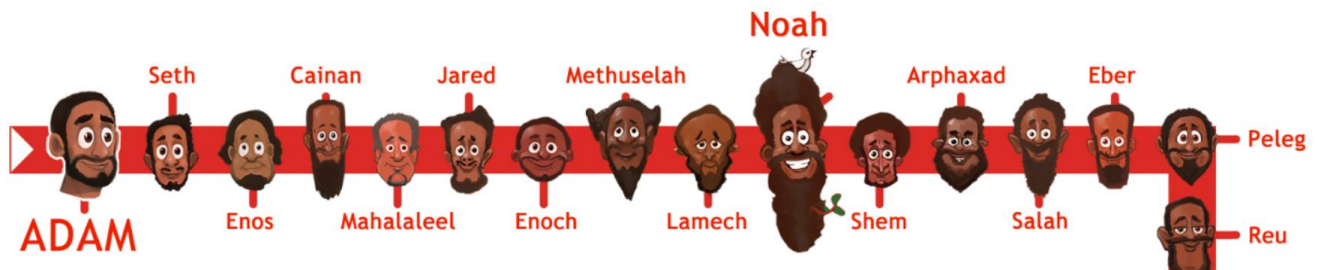
**Genesis 10:21-32** ~ Also to Shem, the father of all the children of Eber, and the older brother of Japheth, children were born. 22 The sons of Shem were Elam and Asshur and Arpachshad and Lud and Aram. 23 The sons of Aram were Uz and Hul and Gether

<sup>6</sup> <https://www.gotquestions.org/Nimrod-in-the-Bible.html>

and Mash. 24 Arpachshad became the father of Shelah; and Shelah became the father of Eber. 25 Two sons were born to Eber; the name of the one was Peleg, for in his days the earth was divided; and his brother's name was Joktan. 26 Joktan became the father of Almodad and Sheleph and Hazarmaveth and Jerah 27 and Hadoram and Uzal and Diklah 28 and Obal and Abimael and Sheba Genesis 29 and Ophir and Havilah and Jobab; all these were the sons of Joktan. 30 Now their settlement extended from Mesha as you go toward Sephar, the hill country of the east. 31 These are the sons of Shem, according to their families, according to their languages, by their lands, according to their nations. 32 These are the families of the sons of Noah, according to their genealogies, by their nations; and out of these the nations were separated on the earth after the flood.

- The descendants from Shem are recorded last because the genealogy moves to the Seed son
- However, not all of his descendants would be part of the Messianic line
- So again, the account briefly lists them to dismiss them
- The next *toledoth* will deal with the Seed line (see Gen 11:10-32)
- This section begins by explaining that Shem is “the father of all the children of Eber,” the great grandson of Shem through whom the Messianic line went...and from whom the “Hebrews” likely got their name
- “The Jewish people are biblically defined as the descendants of Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob. This logically means they are descendants of Shem, so are ‘semites.’”<sup>7</sup>
- Shem had 5 sons, most of whom would be the ancestors of non-Jewish Shemitic people
- Some notable observations about Shem’s sons:
  1. Elam – ancestor of the Elamites who lived east of Babylon in what was later called Persia, in modern-day Iran
  2. Asshur – ancestor of the Assyrians
  3. Arpachshad – the Seed son, through whose line the Messiah would come

**Genesis 10:24-25** ~ Arpachshad became the father of Shelah; and Shelah became the father of Eber. 25 Two sons were born to Eber; the name of the one was Peleg, for in his days the earth was divided; and his brother's name was Joktan.



**Luke 3:35-36** ~ the son of Serug, the son of Reu, the son of Peleg, the son of Heber, the son of Shelah, the son of Cainan, the son of Arphaxad, the son of Shem, the son of Noah, the son of Lamech,

- What does it mean in v. 25 ~ the name of the one was Peleg, for in his days the earth was divided?
- Some have suggested that this refers to the division of the continents after the flood, i.e. divided geologically

<sup>7</sup> Sarfati, *Genesis Account*, 650.



- But it is best to understand this as referring to the division of the people into language groups at the Tower of Babel
- The same word “earth” (*eretz*) that is used in Gen 10:25 is also used in the immediate context of the scattering of the nations of Babel

**Genesis 10:25** ~ Two sons were born to Eber; the name of the one was Peleg, for in his days the earth was divided; and his brother’s name was Joktan.

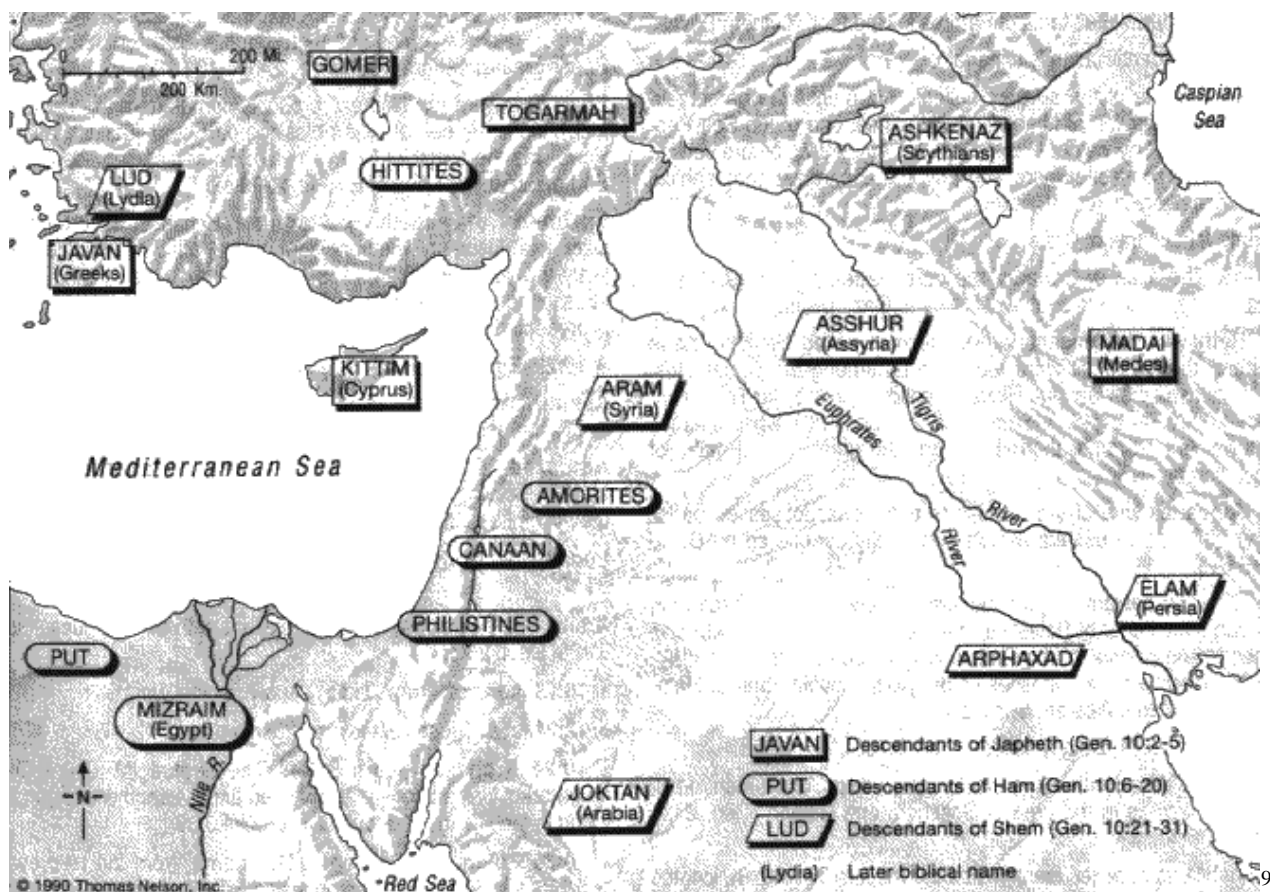
**Genesis 11:1** ~ Now the whole earth used the same language and the same words.

**Genesis 11:9** ~ Therefore its name was called Babel, because there the LORD confused the language of the whole earth; and from there the LORD scattered them abroad over the face of the whole earth.

- Also, “Peleg’s family history is noted once again following the Tower of Babel ([Genesis 11:16–19](#)). The fact that Peleg is mentioned before and immediately after the account of the Tower of Babel helps clarify that this is the key event that divided the earth. It seems the earth was not divided geologically, but its *people* were divided into various language groups.”<sup>8</sup>

4. Lud – possibly connected to the region of Lydia (western Turkey)

5. Aram – the area known today as Syria



- The key point of this chapter is to prove that all the different nations share a common humanity (v. 32)

<sup>8</sup> <https://www.gotquestions.org/earth-divided-Peleg.html>

<sup>9</sup> MacArthur, J., Jr. (Ed.). (1997). *The MacArthur Study Bible* (electronic ed., p. 30). Nashville, TN: Word Pub.



## DO GENESIS 10 AND 11 CONTRADICT EACH OTHER?

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- Some have claimed that there is a contradiction between Genesis 10 and 11: If people had already spread around the world as recorded in Gen 10, why was mankind judged at the Tower of Babel in Gen 11?

- God had repeatedly given the command to fill the earth:

**Genesis 1:28** ~ God blessed them; and God said to them, “Be fruitful and multiply, and fill the earth, and subdue it; and rule over the fish of the sea and over the birds of the sky and over every living thing that moves on the earth.”

**Genesis 9:1** ~ And God blessed Noah and his sons and said to them, “Be fruitful and multiply, and fill the earth.

**Genesis 9:7** ~ As for you, be fruitful and multiply; Populate the earth abundantly and multiply in it.

- And Genesis 10 indicates that is what happened

**Genesis 10:5** ~ From these the coastlands of the nations were separated into their lands, every one according to his language, according to their families, into their nations.

**Genesis 10:20** ~ These are the sons of Ham, according to their families, according to their languages, by their lands, by their nations.

**Genesis 10:31** ~ These are the sons of Shem, according to their families, according to their languages, by their lands, according to their nations.

- In fact, the chapter closes with this statement:

**Genesis 10:32** ~ These are the families of the sons of Noah, according to their genealogies, by their nations; and out of these the nations were separated on the earth after the flood.

- So, if Noah and his sons all spoke the same languages, where did these languages come from?
- And why did the dispersion occur in at the Tower of Babel if Gen 10 indicates it had already occurred?
- The answer to this supposed contradiction is quite simple: “There is no contradiction here; Moses merely put the effect before the cause. *Genesis 10* gives an overview, and then *Genesis 11* fills in the details. You often find the same technique in other history books. One chapter might contain an overview of World War I—along with a list of major events. But the very next chapter might detail what the world was like in the years before the war and what events led up to it.”<sup>10</sup>

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<sup>10</sup> <https://answersingenesis.org/contradictions-in-the-bible/the-order-of-nations/>