

# Genesis – Lesson 9

## The Tower of Babel

### Read Genesis 10

1. List the *immediate* sons of Japheth, Ham, and Shem listed in this chapter. Why do *you* think that Ham's descendants receive so much more attention than the others?

The sons of Japheth (v. 2): Gomer, Magog, Madai, Javan, Tubal, Meshech, and Tiras. The sons of Ham (v. 6): Cush, Egypt, Put, and Canaan. The sons of Shem (v. 21): Elam, Asshur, Arpachshad, Lud, and Aram. Given the *eventual* descendents of Ham, it seems reasonable to conclude that Moses gives much more detail about them because they became the *enemies* of Israel. To the wandering Israelites receiving this book, this genealogy would remind them (as they come to the Promised Land) that *they* belong to a different line (i.e. Shem), and what God tells them to do about these peoples is due to their lineage and the curse of Noah upon them.

2. (a) Give three *facts* about Nimrod from Genesis 10:6-12. What kind of man was Nimrod?

First, he was a “*mighty man*” (v. 8) and a “*mighty hunter*” (v. 9) before the Lord. Second, his kingdom included Babel, Erech, Accad, and Calneh in Shinar. Third, he went into the land of Assyria and built the city of Nineveh. All of this would imply that Nimrod was a great *emperor*, probably one of the first to amass and govern a large swath of peoples in the primitive world.

(b) List the main *cities* that are associated with Nimrod. How does Nimrod's character relate to their *later* relationship with Israel?

The main cities include Babel and Nineveh. Both of these become the *locus* of rebellion against God and his people. Nineveh, the capital of the eventual empire of Assyria, would come against Israel and take the 10 northern tribes into captivity in 722BC. Their nature as “*bullies*” against other peoples can be directly traced to the character of Nimrod mentioned here: as he bullied the known world with his might and power into subjection, so, too, would the Assyrians rise up and bully the world into domination under them.

(c) Why did Moses *include* chapter 10 in Genesis? How might it have *helped* the Israelites?

Chapter 10 lays out the *rac*es, and their eventual dispersion in the world. It places the Israelites into the Semitic tribes, and demonstrates how the other nations of the world think in respect to them. This chapter gives the Israelites help in knowing *what to do* when they enter into the Promised Land and confront these other peoples: when God tells them to destroy all of them, this chapter will help them to understand *why*. Because the nations are descended from people who rebelled against God (from the beginning), and have *continued* that rebellion down through the centuries, the Israelites are given a *reason* for their destruction. In a sense, this chapter *confirms* God eventual command to destroy these various peoples, because their nature is related to those they have followed and they *deserve* to be wiped out.

### Read Genesis 11:1-9

3. (a) Compare Genesis 11:1 with 10:5, 20, and 31. *When* did this event take place in relation to the flood and the dispersion of the clans of the sons of Noah?

It would appear that the events of Genesis 11 happen *before* the dispersion of the races outlined in Genesis 10. The fact that each tribe has its own language when dispersed implies that the confusing of languages mentioned in Genesis 11 must happen *earlier*.

(b) Give three reasons *why* men built the Tower of Babel? What was the *primary* intention of it?

The tower serves three purposes (from v. 4): 1) as the center of a *gathering* of people, a city in the land of Shinar, a rallying point; 2) to make a name for themselves, a towering monument to their own greatness and abilities; and 3) to prevent the people from being dispersed, a locale from which Nimrod could rule over the people of the world. Its intention was to draw people *together* in a single place, where humanity could be ruled over by Nimrod.

(c) How was the building of the tower a *violation* of God's command to Noah's sons in Genesis 9?

God had commanded Noah and his sons to multiply and *fill the earth*, to scatter throughout the world and to take dominion over every corner of the planet. This scattering would allow people to live in relative peace in their relationship to their Creator without any *centralized* government or empire ruling over them and controlling them. However, by building a city with a tower as its center, and using that city as a rallying point for people to come and live under an emperor, the command to scatter abroad was violated. In other words, the city became iconic of a *rebellion* against the explicit command of God for human beings to fill the earth; the leadership of the city *purposely* tried to get humanity to come and live in this place in order to control them and exercise power over them.

4. (a) How did God *respond* to the building of the tower? Why is this *ironic*?

God responded by "*going down*" to see what the people had done. Obviously, God is spirit and he knows all things; it would not be necessary for him to "go down" literally to see what was happening. This could indicate either 1) a metaphorical statement about God looking down from heaven and seeing the situation, or 2) another example of a *theophany*, where God takes on human "form" and walks around in a physical place to see what is happening. The irony is that the people were building a tower "*with its top in the heavens,*" but God had to come down to see it; no matter how "high" the tower got, its top would *never* reach the abode of God, so God would have to come down to visit these puny creatures and their building project.

(b) What did God do to *interfere* with the plans in building the tower? How is this still seen *today*?

God interfered by confusing the languages of the various people-groups, making them unable to communicate with one another. This would put an end to the building project, since the people constructing it would not be able to understand one another. So, the people of a particular language (and tribe) would have to go off by themselves since no one else would be able to live in their land and understand them. This is still the reality today, in spite of many centuries of time: human beings are still divided up by language. With over 7000 dialects in the world, the ability to communicate with others is *still* highly divisive, and certain languages are still localized to places where only its speakers can be found.

5. (a) Compare this event to Revelation 5:9; 7:9. How is the diversity of languages *redeemed* by God?

God will redeem the diversity of languages in the world by calling people of every language to Jesus Christ. The gospel call will go out to every tribe, tongue and nation, and the elect of every one of them will respond to the *universal* message of salvation available therein. No longer will language be a barrier to understanding; the message of the gospel will be understandable by every elect person, regardless of the *personal* language that they speak.

(b) Compare this event to Matthew 25:31-46. When will Christ *reassemble* the nations of the earth?

God will gather the peoples of the world back before himself in Jesus Christ on the day of judgment. When Christ returns, the barrier of language that *scattered* people because they could not understand one another will be torn down, and every people-group will be drawn by Christ to heaven, where they will sing a *single* song of praise to God gathered around his everlasting throne.

(c) How does the gospel of Jesus Christ break down the *scattering effect* of Babel and overcome the *language barriers* imposed by God from there?

**The message of the Gospel is the message of salvation from the awful consequences of rebellion against God. Although the people had purposed to *centralize* themselves over against God's explicit command to scatter (in rebellion), and although God had forced them out over the entire earth, the message of the Gospel is a "gathering" of the people of God back together where their rebellion against him is forgiven. The Gospel *gathers* people under Christ, where they are no longer living for their *own name*, but for *his name*; where they are brought together in a common worship of God, and where their language is one of *unity* with one another in Christ.**