

**Introduction**

Recall that there are 10 major sections in the book of Genesis; each is introduced with the phrase “this is the genealogy of...” After the death of Noah in 9:29, we have a new section in 10:1 which is traditionally called “The Table of Nations.” It shows us the origin of different national entities after the flood.

There may be slight confusion regarding the ordering of chapters 10 and 11, because 10:5, 20, 31 mention “languages” or “tongues,” but chapter 11 describes the origin of different languages at the Tower of Babel. Is there a mistake here? Not at all. Chapter 11 explains how the different nations listed in chapter 10 got started. Chapter 10 is a summary, chapter 11 the explanation. We will start with chapter 11 first.

**The Tower of Babel**

## 1. Common Language and Congregating Together, vv. 1-2

Verse 1 tells us plainly that there was only one language on the earth after the flood. Obviously this must be the language that Noah and his family spoke.

Verse 2 suggests that they were journeying together, and they decided to set up shop in Mesopotamia in the land called Shinar.

## 2. Plan to Build a Tall Tower, vv. 3-4

Verse 3 shows that the people had building materials to make bricks and mortar. So, they thought in verse 4 to build a city and a very tall tower. They probably were going to shift from more nomadic to city dwelling for one thing. Second, the tower they suggested was probably what we call today a ziggurat, a terraced tower with the lower layers bigger than the ones above them. These were built for the worship of pagan gods.

There were two purposes that they had in doing this. The first one was that they wanted to make a name for themselves. They wanted fame and renown because of the great project they had accomplished. This could mean that they wanted to make a lasting name or heritage that would last for future generations. The second and related purpose was that they did not want to be scattered over the face of the earth.

But the Lord had commanded Noah in 9:1 to fill the earth, not try to purposefully stick together.

## 3. God’s Response to Their Plans, vv. 5-7

God viewed the work they were doing and agrees that they would be able to accomplish it because they all share a single language. They “understand one another” and so, since two heads put together are better than one, they could make great progress toward their goal. In fact, “nothing that they propose to do will be withheld.” It is not clear what they might have proposed.

God resolves to confuse their language, with one result that they would not understand one another any more.

This passage teaches us that the origin of languages was not evolutionary but was supernatural. At least a number of basic languages was created at this point. After this, other variants could easily develop because of regional isolation.

## 4. The Confusion of the Languages, vv. 8-9

A second result of the confusion of the languages was that the people were scattered. They would now fill the earth, despite their initial rebellion against doing so. A third result was that the people ceased building their grand city.

The city was named “Babel” which means “confusion.”

The Bible makes it very clear that it was at this point that God scattered the people over the face of the whole earth. The existence of people in all parts of the globe is attributable to this event. When you hear of the American and South American Indians and the “Alaskan land bridge” or whatever, think Genesis 11. (By the way, don’t you suppose that these people knew how to handle sea vessels?)

**Table of Nations**

The list in chapter 10 is daunting. Including Noah and his three sons, there are about 73 names or nationalities listed. The table is divided into three sections bracketed by an introduction in verse 1 and a summary in verse 32.

## 1. Sons of Japheth, vv. 2-5

These peoples went north and west and probably included the Medes, Greeks, Celtic peoples, and inhabitants of modern-day Cyprus, Russia, Armenia, and Germany. Verse 5 identifies these as the “coastland peoples.”

## 2. Sons of Ham, vv. 6-20

These folks populated northern Africa and the land of Palestine (Philistines, Canaanites, Amorites, and many of the Bible –ites that we encounter in the OT). Perhaps the most famous of all these people was Nimrod, who has four verses devoted to him in the text. He is called a mighty man, a mighty hunter, and he was a king of several cities starting with Babel and including Nineveh.

## 3. Sons of Shem, vv. 21-31

These people were east of Babylon and in northern Arabia. Note that Abram moved out of Ur of the Chaldees to Haran, and then from Haran to present-day Israel, so this identification makes some sense.

**References**

1. [http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Table\\_of\\_nations](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Table_of_nations)