

# ReGroups 9/10/23

## Origin Stories: Table of Nations - Genesis 10-11

### *Big Picture*

Genesis 10 is probably one of the most underrated, overlooked chapters in all the Bible. While it may not offer a great practical application for us to learn or even give us much theological insight compared to the preceding chapters, it does prove to have a lot of **historical, geographical significance**. Our modern world, its layouts and the diverse, segmented cultures can be traced back to *this very text*.

While not offering any direct teaching, there is however tons of symbolism in this chapter and its content. There are 70 names mentioned in this chapter, all of people who are remembered as founders and progenitors of their own nation. Of course, these nations began as mere families and tribes, many of these individual names would also be attached to the nation's identify.

Of the 70 people named, most were also the names of their nations, with just a few exceptions. Reading through this chapter gives you the post-flood landscape of the world and shows the diverging paths of the tribes and nations as they began to develop and establish their own identities. Most the nations mentioned in this chapter reflect their original names, but through external resources we can connect them with their modern counterparts.

For the first part of this lesson, we will take a broad approach and connect some dots between these listed nations and today's world. This will certainly cause us to appreciate this text in a brand new way. Afterwards, we will discuss what symbolism may be here for us.

### *Starting Over*

After the Flood, Noah's family was tasked with refilling and developing the earth. Genesis 10 spotlights his three sons as being ground zero for the this new generation. This chapter is often called the "*Table of Nations*", as it shows how these three began to take the world beyond its Middle Eastern starting point. On the following page, take a look at the map and notice the three distinct directions the three families take.



**What stands out to you about this formative phase of the new world? Can you see how the three men and their descendants all settled in a similar, general area?** Let's take a look at one major family at a time. It would probably be best to skim these passages, seeing that the the names can often be tricky to pronounce:

- The sons of **Japheth (Genesis 10:2-5)** - These are the founders and settlers of Europe and Russia. Many of these names are actually ancient names for several modern countries, such as Magog (Russia), Gomer (Germany), Javan (Greece), Tiras (Italy), Tarshish (Spain)
- The sons of **Ham (Genesis 10:6-20)** - These are the founders and settlers of the Middle Eastern Mediterranean region and all of Africa. Egypt obviously stands out above them all. However, many of these didn't remain in the vicinity of their relatives, as Nimrod would move east and build a kingdom amidst the Shemites. Some even believe that the Sinites may be an ancestor to the Chinese people.

- The sons of **Shem (Genesis 10:21-31)** - This is where we get the label, Semitic people. Most of the Middle Eastern people, including the Jewish people, come from this line. In fact, the name Hebrew is most likely derived from Eber (**10:24**).

### ***The Nimrod Factor***

Read **Genesis 10:8-13** and see if any of these nations are familiar with you. Among Nimrod's kingdom, we read about the nations of Babel, Akkadia, Assyria - all of which played a major role in shaping the ancient world. The world's first empire is remembered as *the Akkadian Empire*, and its from that foundation that the Assyrian and Babylonian Empires would rule later on.

Nimrod is the only descendant of Ham who moves inward away from the Mediterranean Sea. He would become a powerful force over the Semitic people, and create the world's first major ruling government. Many associate him with Sargon the Great, who ruled the Akkadian Empire.

Sargon is remembered for leading much of the world away from worshipping God, emphasizing the sufficiency of man. He built monuments to himself all over his empire called Ziggurats. The most famous of these was built in the city of Babel. More on that in a minute, but first take a look at these two depictions of what these ancient shrines could've looked like:



In many ways, Nimrod is a picture of the Anti-Christ. He unified his world, seeing two major regions join forces across their cultural lines. He did so by promoting the idea that people were being held back by God and religion. He promised prosperity and peace for those followed him, yet ultimately led them to a confused, lost place. **What do you think about these similarities?**

## ***A Name For Ourselves***

Read **Genesis 11:1-9** and Nimrod's vision enacted and put in motion by those in his kingdom. **How does this attempt to exalt humanity end up impacting the world?**

At this point, everyone spoke the same language, which made unification much more achievable. It was a perfect storm, and Nimrod cast the perfect vision. Thankfully, God stepped in before the world was mostly united in defiance against Him. This was yet another step in driving the nations apart and distinguishing them from one another. With their own languages, they began to work independently of one another and establishing their own unique cultures.

Fittingly, this city was Babel, which means "*to confound or confuse*". In each others' ears, everyone seemed to be babbling from that day forward. As time has always shown, any endeavor to make *a name for ourselves* only results in a less than satisfied, unfulfilled life. As **1 Corinthians 3:11-13** suggests, only what is done for Christ will last and be remembered in Eternity.

### ***Narrowing Focus***

From there the story of Genesis takes a much more narrow approach. From the broad, global perspective of Genesis 10, Genesis 11 begins to zero in on Shem's family, from Arpachshad (**11:12**) to Eber (**11:16**) to Terah and Abram (**11:26**). It's through Abram's family that God begins the long, winding journey of reunifying the earth. Just as Babel symbolized the world being divided by sin, another famous story showcases how God would bring the world back together. Read **Acts 2:1-13** and **compare and contrast** what happens on the day of Pentecost with what took place at Babel.

**Do you see how God is bringing the world back together through Christ?**

The languages being united are merely a picture of the much deeper lines of division being overcome. While our individual and cultural distinctions are celebrated by God, He longs for us all to be united together around our faith and common cause.

Division is never His will, and Babel was an unfortunate necessity in a world where everyone was united for all the wrong reasons. The night before Jesus died, He prayed restlessly over this very issue with regard to His followers. Read **John 17:9-11, 20-24**. **Why does Jesus pray for us to be united? How does He see us accomplishing this goal?**

Jesus wants us to be in true fellowship with God, *where He is at all times*. He tells us that we can only achieve this through unity with one another. We no longer have to be bound by sin or constrained by worldly agendas. We can find a greater reason and meaning for life through Christ and His Church. **How should we set aside our differences and find unity, across personal, cultural, and national bounds for the glory of God and greater good of our world? What excuses do we use as to why this cannot be achieved?**

**Revelation 7:8-12** previews a scene in heaven where people from all the corners of the earth are singing together, in one voice. The roots of Babel run deep in our world, and they work tirelessly to keep us divided. Revelation talks about how the spirit of Nimrod and Babel still casts its shadow over the world, yet we know how the story ends. Only through Christ can we escape this bondage and take hold of our true mission in life.

### ***To The Ends Of The Earth***

Bringing this all full circle, and adding to the symbolism of these chapters is the number of nations listed in Genesis 10 and how this corresponds to a chapter in the Gospels. There are 70 names listed in Genesis 10, and that happens to be the number of messengers that Jesus commissions to spread the Gospel in Luke 10.<sup>1</sup> ***This can't be a coincidence, can it?***

Read **Luke 10:1-2** and discuss how the Good News is for all people, of all nations. **Do you see the significance in Jesus matching the number of nations at the onset of our modern world? Do you think this is His way of saying the Gospel has the power to reach everyone, and bring to world back together as it was intended?**

As with the story of Pentecost and the book of Acts in general, we know that God has commissioned His Church to go unto the whole world with the Gospel. Review **Matthew 28:18-20**, **Acts 1:8**, and **Acts 17:24-28** and **discuss** how *you've* responded to the Great Commission *in your own life* and how we as a church should take this very seriously.

When God started the main arc of the Redemption Story with Abraham, it appeared that the world may be too far gone. However, as we've seen, even with the population spreading far and wide, God had a plan to reach everyone with the same message. In light of this showcase of God's sovereignty, may we all resolve to be more faithful and diligent in reaching people for Him.

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<sup>1</sup> Some manuscripts features 72 names and 72 messengers