

SERMON SERIES

DISCUSSION GUIDE

STORY OF FAITH: WEEK 4

Genesis chapters 10 and 11 help explain how the nations became scattered across the face of the world. Scholars have noted these two chapters might actually be out of order chronologically. At the beginning of chapter 11, the whole world is of “one language” and one vocabulary. But chapter 10 has already divided the nations according to peoples and tongues (see Genesis 10:5, 20, 31). Therefore, Genesis 11:1–9 appears to explain how the “nations” in chapter 10 came about. (Note: some parts of Genesis are arranged thematically and not chronologically.)

Genesis 10 lists the descendants of Noah’s sons (Shem, Ham, and Japeth) after the Flood. Sadly, many of Israel’s future enemies come from Ham’s descendants, including the Egyptians, Babylonians, Philistines, and various Canaanite groups. In Genesis 10:8-12 we read of Nimrod, the great-grandson of Noah through Ham who was a “mighty hunter before the LORD” (v.9). He may have also been the first dictator, the founder of the Babylonian empire, and probably in charge of the tower of Babel construction.

God had commanded men to replenish the earth (Genesis 9:1, 7), but they decided to settle down on the plain of Shinar where Babylon was located. In his outlines of the Old Testament, Warren Wiersbe explains that this was a deliberate rebellion against God’s Word. Humanity decided to unite and build both a city and a tower. Their purposes were to (1) maintain unity--in opposition to God, and (2) make a name for themselves. But God knew their plans and judged them by confusing their language, making it impossible for them to work together. This was really an act of mercy as well as judgment, for had they persisted in their plan, a more terrible judgment would have followed. The description of God’s action here explains the origin of the languages of mankind. It has often been pointed out that Pentecost was a reversal of Babel—there was true spiritual unity among God’s people; they spoke with other tongues but were understood; and their work glorified God, not men (Wiersbe, 1993).

FOLD HERE

GENESIS 11:1-9 ESV

- 1 Now the whole earth had one language and the same words.
- 2 And as people migrated from the east, they found a plain in the land of Shinar and settled there.
- 3 And they said to one another, “Come, let us make bricks, and burn them thoroughly.” And they had brick for stone, and bitumen for mortar.
- 4 Then they said, “Come, let us build ourselves a city and a tower with its top in the heavens, and let us make a name for ourselves, lest we be dispersed over the face of the whole earth.”
- 5 And the LORD came down to see the city and the tower, which the children of man had built.
- 6 And the LORD said, “Behold, they are one people, and they have all one language, and this is only the beginning of what they will do. And nothing that they propose to do will now be impossible for them.
- 7 Come, let us go down and there confuse their language, so that they may not understand one another’s speech.”
- 8 So the LORD dispersed them from there over the face of all the earth, and they left off building the city.
- 9 Therefore its name was called Babel, because there the LORD confused the language of all the earth. And from there the LORD dispersed them over the face of all the earth.

Table of Nations: According to the ESV Study Bible, many of the people groups mentioned in Genesis 10 can be identified with relative certainty. In general, the descendants of Ham settled in North Africa and the eastern Mediterranean coast, the descendants of Shem in Mesopotamia and Arabia, and the descendants of Japheth in Europe and the greater area of Asia Minor.

Many Bibles will have a map of the Table of Nations from Genesis 10. If your Bible does not have this resource, consider finding it online:
<https://www.esv.org/resources/esv-global-study-bible/map-01-03/>

DISCUSSION GUIDE QUESTIONS

on your own, with family, or with your small group

Using a map in your Bible or an online map, can you locate where Nimrod journeyed and the Tower of Babel might have been located?

Read Genesis 10:6-20 and the descendants of Ham. How many names do you recognize who would later become enemies of Israel? Compare with Judges 3:1-5.

According to Genesis 11:1-4, what were the people’s intentions in building the Tower of Babel?

What did God’s actions in Genesis 11:7-8 ultimately force the people to do? Give several reasons why God wanted this outcome.

Our world is becoming more interconnected through the internet, computers, travel, etc... What potential dangers do you see in our repeating the sins of Nimrod? And how can we stay pure for the Lord in this increasingly influential (and sinful) world culture?

What is the main point of Genesis 11:1-9?