

*The* **Tower**  
*of* **Babel**  
The origin and dispersal of the nations



## Acknowledgments

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# Introduction

Genesis 1–11 is under attack in today’s culture. In many cases, we read of attacks on Genesis 1 and 2 where attempts are made to add millions of years to the creation week.<sup>1</sup> We see attacks on the fall of mankind in Genesis 3 where there is a denial of the reality of Adam and Eve, original sin, and the need for a Savior. We observe further attacks with the denial of Satan’s involvement by claiming he is not real.<sup>2</sup>

We see attacks on Genesis 4 and 5 with alleged gaps in the genealogies and attempts to squeeze thousands of years into them (even though this does not help the case for millions of years).<sup>3</sup> Genesis 6–9 have come under attack, with some claiming the flood was just a local event and reinterpreting flood rock layers as evidence for millions of years.<sup>4</sup>

Genesis 10 and 11 are under severe attack as well. Scholars write off what occurred at the tower of Babel as mythology and deny that it was a historical event. Join me as we dive into the Bible and look into history and theology in a God-honoring fashion to refute these attacks.

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- 1 A book that tackles this subject is Ken Ham’s *The Lie: Evolution/Millions of Years* (Green Forest, AR: Master Books, 2012).
  - 2 A book that addresses attacks on Genesis 3 is Bodie Hodge’s *The Fall of Satan* (Green Forest, AR: Master Books, 2011).
  - 3 There are three chapters that deal with this in *The New Answers Book 2*, Ken Ham, gen. ed. (Green Forest, AR: Master Books, 2008): “How old is the earth?” by Bodie Hodge, “Are there gaps in the Genesis genealogies?” by Larry Pierce and Ken Ham, and “Doesn’t Egyptian chronology prove that the Bible is unreliable?” by Dr. Elizabeth Mitchell.
  - 4 There are numerous books that tackle this subject from the time-honored classic *The Genesis Flood* by Drs. Henry Morris and John Whitcomb to Dr. Andrew Snelling’s treatise *Earth’s Catastrophic Past*. Also, *The New Answers Books 1, 2, and 3* have a number of chapters discussing these attacks.

THE FIRST BOOK OF MOSES  
COMMONLY CALLED  
**GENESIS**

In the beginning God created the heavens and the earth. The earth was without form and void, and darkness was upon the face of the deep. And the Spirit of God was moving over the face of the waters. God said, "Let there be light," and there was light. And God saw that the light was good; and he separated the light from the darkness. God called the light Day, and the darkness he called Night. And there was evening and there was morning.

# The Biblical Account

## Genesis 11:1–9

<sup>1</sup> Now the whole earth had one language and the same words. <sup>2</sup> And as people migrated from the east, they found a plain in the land of Shinar and settled there. <sup>3</sup> 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. <sup>4</sup> 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.” <sup>5</sup> And the LORD came down to see the city and the tower, which the children of man had built. <sup>6</sup> 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. <sup>7</sup> Come, let us go down and there confuse their language, so that they may not understand one another’s speech.” <sup>8</sup> So the LORD dispersed them from there over the face of all the earth, and they left off building the city. <sup>9</sup> 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.

Next, we insert the genealogies of Noah’s three sons. Their descendants gathered together at Babel and built a tower. They were involved when the confusion occurred. This is the division of their familial genealogies, allotted lands, and language splitting.

# Genesis 10

<sup>1</sup> These are the generations of the sons of Noah, Shem, Ham, and Japheth. Sons were born to them after the flood.

## Descendants of Japheth

<sup>2</sup> The sons of Japheth: Gomer, Magog, Madai, Javan, Tubal, Meshech, and Tiras. <sup>3</sup> The sons of Gomer: Ashkenaz, Riphath, and Togarmah. <sup>4</sup> The sons of Javan: Elishah, Tarshish, Kittim, and Dodanim. <sup>5</sup> From these the coastland peoples spread in their lands, each with his own language, by their clans, in their nations.

## Descendants of Ham

<sup>6</sup> The sons of Ham: Cush, Egypt, Put, and Canaan. <sup>7</sup> The sons of Cush: Seba, Havilah, Sabtah, Raamah, and Sabteca. The sons of Raamah: Sheba and Dedan. <sup>8</sup> Cush fathered Nimrod; he was the first on earth to be a mighty man. <sup>9</sup> He was a mighty hunter before the LORD. Therefore it is said, "Like Nimrod a mighty hunter before the LORD." <sup>10</sup> The beginning of his kingdom was Babel, Erech, Accad, and Calneh, in the land of Shinar. <sup>11</sup> From that land he went into Assyria and built Nineveh, Rehoboth-Ir, Calah, and <sup>12</sup> Resen between Nineveh and Calah; that is the great city. <sup>13</sup> Egypt fathered Ludim, Anamim, Lehabim, Naphtuhim, <sup>14</sup> Pathrusim, Casluhim (from whom the Philistines came), and Caphtorim. <sup>15</sup> Canaan fathered Sidon his firstborn and Heth, <sup>16</sup> and the Jebusites, the Amorites, the Girgashites, <sup>17</sup> the Hivites, the Arkites, the Sinites, <sup>18</sup> the Arvadites, the Zemarites, and the Hamathites. Afterward the clans of the Canaanites dispersed. <sup>19</sup> And the territory of the Canaanites extended from Sidon in the direction of Gerar as far as Gaza, and in the direction of Sodom, Gomorrah, Admah, and Zeboiim, as far as Lasha. <sup>20</sup> These are the sons of Ham, by their clans, their languages, their lands, and their nations.



## Descendants of Shem

<sup>21</sup> To Shem also, the father of all the children of Eber, the elder brother of Japheth, the children were born. <sup>22</sup> The sons of Shem: Elam, Asshur, Arpachshad, Lud, and Aram. <sup>23</sup> The sons of Aram: Uz, Hul, Gether, and Mash. <sup>24</sup> Arpachshad fathered Shelah; and Shelah fathered Eber. <sup>25</sup> To Eber were born two sons: the name of the one was Peleg, for in his days the earth was divided, and his brother's name was Joktan. <sup>26</sup> Joktan fathered Almodad, Sheleph, Hazarmaveth, Jerah, <sup>27</sup> Hadoram, Uzal, Diklah, <sup>28</sup> Obal, Abimael, Sheba, <sup>29</sup> Ophir, Havilah, and Jobab; all these were the sons of Joktan. <sup>30</sup> The territory in which they lived extended from Mesha in the direction of Sephar to the hill country of the east. <sup>31</sup> These are the sons of Shem, by their clans, their languages, their lands, and their nations. <sup>32</sup> These are the clans of the sons of Noah, according to their genealogies, in their nations, and from these the nations spread abroad on the earth after the flood.



# Is There a Contradiction Between Genesis 10 and 11?

Isn't there a contradiction between Genesis 10 (world having multiple languages) and 11 (world having one language)?

## Problems

A number of people have brought up what seems like an insurmountable objection—the supposed contradiction between Genesis 10 and 11. Genesis 10 clearly says that people were separated according to their languages (plural), while Genesis 11 says that there was only one language until after the incident at the tower of Babel. How do we explain this alleged contradiction?

In Genesis 11:1, the account begins, “Now the whole earth had one language and the same words.” But in chapter 10, it reads:

<sup>5</sup> From these the coastland peoples spread in their lands, *each with his own language*, by their clans, in their nations.

<sup>20</sup> These are the sons of Ham, by their clans, *their languages*, their lands, and their nations.

<sup>31</sup> These are the sons of Shem, by their clans, *their languages*, their lands, and their nations.

In fact, one variation of this alleged contradiction is based on Genesis 11:2, where everyone dwelt in the same place, a plain in the land of Shinar. And yet in chapter 10 we find people divided into their various lands.

## The Solution

So how is this resolved? Actually, it is quite simple. Genesis 11:1–9 is the chronological account of the events that occurred. Genesis 10 is the significance or the result of what happened. In other words, Genesis 10 *does not precede* the events in Genesis 11; it just *summarizes and introduces* those events. Genesis 10 sums up *what* happened; Genesis 11 tells *how* it happened.

The opening (“these are the generations of”) and closing of Genesis 10 (“these are the clans of the sons of Noah”) indicate that the material in between is a genealogy or breakdown of the families. This material fills in extra detail, which here includes the actual division of the languages by respective family groups, or clans, as a result of the splitting up of the earth in Genesis 11:1–9.

This type of thing was common in Hebrew. For example, Genesis 1:1–2:3 is the chronological account of creation. Then the rest of Genesis 2 is a breakdown of the events occurring on day six of creation. The second chapter gives more details of something that happened during creation week. In a like manner, Genesis 10 gives more detail of something that happened in Genesis 11:1–9.

So the solution presents itself when reading the passages: one is chronological (Genesis 11:1–9) and the other is a breakdown of what happened as a result of the linguistic division (Genesis 10). It simply confuses some people because of the placement of chapter 10 prior to chapter 11.

This arrangement serves another purpose. After Genesis 11:1–9, we immediately dive into the genealogy of Shem and follow it to Abraham, where the rest of the Old Testament continues to build. If Genesis 10 were placed between Genesis 11:9–10, it would be an awkward switch since the Genesis 11 genealogies pick up with a

different style. Unlike the Genesis 10 genealogies, the ones in Genesis 11 include *chronological* data down to Abraham. By placing Genesis 10 before Genesis 11:1–9, Moses was clearly making a distinction by how these were edited together.



# Why Were the People Disobedient?

People have asked, “Why was God so mean that he came down and inflicted such confusion on those innocent people at Babel?”

First, God is a fair judge and does not inflict judgment on anyone without cause. Second, none of us are innocent, and all of us have fallen short ever since the entrance of sin in Genesis 3. And by rights, we should be asking the question “Why is the Lord so patient with us, considering that even one sin is worthy of the judgment of a perfectly holy God?”

Many people today fail to read much of the Bible and know precious little about the character of God. So if someone asks you this question, try not to be taken aback. Rather, be patient with them.

To answer this, we need to jump back to Genesis 9 because the people at Babel were being utterly disobedient:

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

This is reiterated later in Genesis 9:

And you, be fruitful and multiply, increase greatly on the earth and multiply in it. (Genesis 9:7)

The descendants of Noah were to be fruitful, multiply, and fill the earth. In fact, the descendants of Noah knew this command very well:

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.” (Genesis 11:4)

Notice in verse 4 how they said, “lest we be dispersed over the face of the whole earth.” They were *intentionally* trying to defy God. They knew God’s command and were trying to go against him. This is sin (disobedience to God).

How is it that they knew this command? Surely Noah and his sons passed this information along to them. Noah was a preacher, or herald, of righteousness (2 Peter 2:5).<sup>1</sup> We often think of Noah preaching against the pre-flood world, and that was indeed the case, as Peter discussed. But there is a little known secret about most preachers . . . they preach until they die! In other words, once a preacher, always a preacher!

Another point of disobedience at Babel is found in Genesis 11:4 and is a *heart* problem. They wanted to make a name for themselves. They were not looking out for others, but for themselves. This is reminiscent of what was going on before the flood. Those wicked people before the flood were “men of renown” (Genesis 6:4).<sup>2</sup> They too were trying to make a name for themselves, and the result was ultimately tremendous violence. The good thing at Babel was that it had not turned to that . . . yet. In retrospect, the judgment at Babel was actually a very mild judgment that was a repercussion of disobedience inflicted on the people to merely confuse their languages.<sup>3</sup>

And there is no doubt that a preacher of righteousness, even after the flood, was able to teach the people what self-centeredness regarding making a name for themselves could lead to. This may have been why the descendants of Noah knew the command to be fruitful, multiply, and fill the earth and the warnings about the pre-flood world’s intoxication with fame.



When we examine the genealogies after the flood in Genesis 5, we see that Noah lived for 350 years after the flood, which is plenty of time to pass this information along to his descendants. And the events at the tower of Babel occurred far sooner than Noah's death in the days of Peleg (Genesis 10:25). And that brings us to the question of *when* the scattering occurred.

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- 1 2 Peter 2:5—"If he did not spare the ancient world, but preserved Noah, a herald of righteousness, with seven others, when he brought a flood upon the world of the ungodly."
  - 2 Genesis 6:4—"The Nephilim were on the earth in those days, and also afterward, when the sons of God came in to the daughters of man and they bore children to them. These were the mighty men who were of old, the men of renown."
  - 3 When we think of judgments, we often think of the severe ones, such as the curse, the flood, the destruction of Sodom and Gomorrah, or the conquest of the Canaanites, but not all judgments are of this severity. Many judgments in the Bible were not too severe (e.g., Exodus 21).