

**Introduction to the Study of GENESIS Chapter 10:  
The Descendants of Noah: the Table of Nations**

Chapter 10 carries forward the genealogy of Noah through his three sons Shem, Ham and Japheth. The chapter is often referred to as the “Table of Nations.” For it is from these three sons of Noah that God repopulates the new world after the flood. From the individuals and people groups recorded in this chapter all the tribes, languages, and nations of the earth descend. Just as God had commanded Adam in Genesis 1:28 to *“be fruitful and multiply and fill the earth,”* so also, He commanded Noah and his sons to do the same: *“Be fruitful and multiply and fill the earth”* (9:1).

In this chapter up to 5 generations are recorded that descend from the sons of Noah. Within this genealogical table many names resurface later in Biblical narratives, some names and people groups will have major roles in the subsequent history of man; indeed, one Hamite in particular receives lengthy attention and is at the center of the events that transpire in the following chapter (ch.11). Additionally, in the genealogy of ch. 10, several others are noted for their significant impact on history and the human race.

The genealogy begins with Japheth to whom seven sons are credited. Most will inhabit regions and lands north and west of the Mesopotamian Valley. None receive special attention in the chapter but some tribes and people groups will later resurface in the initial spread of the gospel and also find a prophetically revealed role in end-time prophecies (ex. Ezekiel).

The descends of Ham are listed second although he is the youngest of Noah’s sons. Ham’s descendants occupy the greatest amount of space in the genealogy with individuals and people groups who will have major roles in the events of history. A well known descendant of Ham is Mizraim, a people group known most commonly as Egyptians. Also, perhaps surprisingly, the Canaanites are Hamites who later are often mentioned in Scripture, and who God dispossesses from their land because of intolerable wickedness (cf. Levitus 18:24-30). It is this real estate that God then promises and gives to Abraham and his descendants as an everlasting covenant. The most illustrious Hamite however, was Nimrod, who receives more attention than anyone else in the chapter. His name likely signifies “rebellion” and he is the one who builds Babel and its idolatrous tower (see ch.11).

Finally, the chapter ends with the descendants of Shem. “The Shemites are the last in this table because they are the most crucial, [they] are the line from which Abraham will emerge. Thus, their placement is for climactic effect” (V. Hamilton, p.344). Within the line of Shem is Eber, who fathers those who become known as Hebrews. Three other names are also historically noteworthy in the line of Shem: Arpachshad, Peleg and Joktan. The chapter then ends as it begins with a summary statement; one that is used to enclose this genealogical record as a historical unit.