

Dr. Kenneth Mathews, Genesis, Session 9, The Nations and the Tower of Babel (Gen. 10:1-11:26) Resources from NotebookLM

1) Abstract, 2) Audio podcast, 3) Briefing Document, 4) Study Guide Quiz, and 5) FAQs

1. Abstract of Mathews, Genesis, Session 9, The Nations and the Tower of Babel (Gen. 10:1-11:26), Biblicalelearning.org, BeL

Dr. Kenneth Mathews' Genesis Session 9 lecture analyzes Genesis 10:1-11:26, focusing on the genealogies of Noah's sons and the Tower of Babel narrative. **He explains the structure** of the text, highlighting the inclusion of two genealogies of Shem, the segmented genealogy in Chapter 10, and the linear genealogy in Chapter 11, showing a progression from Adam to Abraham. **Mathews examines the significance** of the Table of Nations, its moral implications, and its representative nature, emphasizing the 70 nations listed. **The lecture also explores the literary devices** used in the Tower of Babel story, such as inclusio and chiasmus, to convey the themes of pride, false unity, and God's judgment and grace. Finally, **the session connects the Babel narrative to the Pentecost event** in Acts 2, illustrating God's plan for unity among diverse peoples.

2. 17 - minute Audio Podcast Created on the basis of Dr. Mathews, Genesis, Session 9 – Double click icon to play in Windows media player or go to the Biblicalelearning.org [BeL] Site and click the audio podcast link there (Old Testament → Pentateuch → Genesis).



**Mathews_Genesis_
Session09.mp3**

3. Briefing Document: Mathews, Genesis, Session 9, The Nations and the Tower of Babel (Gen. 10:1-11:26)

Okay, here is a detailed briefing document summarizing the key themes and ideas from Dr. Kenneth Mathews' lecture on Genesis 10-11:

Briefing Document: Genesis 10-11 - The Nations and the Tower of Babel

Source: Excerpts from "Mathews_Gen_EN_Session09.pdf"

Overview: This session focuses on the concluding section of Genesis 1-11, a universal history culminating in the Tower of Babel and the Table of Nations. Dr. Mathews emphasizes the theological significance of this section, particularly its role in transitioning from a universal history to the specific lineage of Abraham. The lecture explores the structure of the text, the meaning behind the Table of Nations, and the theological implications of the Tower of Babel narrative.

Key Themes & Ideas:

1. Structure and Superscriptions:

- The section is framed by two genealogies. The first, in Genesis 10:1, introduces the descendants of Noah's sons (Shem, Ham, and Japheth) after the flood, marking the beginning of a new era. The second, in Genesis 11:10, focuses on the lineage of Shem, leading to Abraham.
- The Tower of Babel narrative (Genesis 11:1-9) is sandwiched between these genealogies. This structural arrangement is deliberate and significant.
- The order is dischronological, with the consequences (dispersal of nations) described in Chapter 10 appearing before the cause (Tower of Babel) in Chapter 11. This emphasizes the author's theological intent: to show that the nations' diversity was a result of rebellion against God, and that God's work toward a deliverer (through the line of Shem) is a response to that rebellion. As Mathews says, "Chapter 11, verses 1 through 9, describes the causation, and chapter 10 describes the result of that cause, in other words, cause-effect."

1. The Importance of Shem's Lineage:

- Two genealogies of Shem are given, emphasizing the significance of his descendants. This is due to the curse on Canaan (Ham's son) in Genesis 9.

- The linear genealogy of Shem is designed to show how God will bring about the promised deliverer, culminating in Abraham. As Mathews notes, "God is, by virtue of the linear, distinguishing from the others the genealogy by whom he will bring about the deliverer promised to Adam and Eve."

1. **Types of Genealogies:**

- **Segmented Genealogies (Genesis 10):** These genealogies list multiple descendants of a patriarch. They provide a branching picture of different family lines (e.g. multiple descendants of Japheth, Ham and Shem).
- **Linear Genealogies (Genesis 5 & 11:10-26):** These genealogies list one descendant per generation. This establishes a direct line of ancestry (e.g. Adam to Seth to Noah in Chapter 5, Shem to Abraham's father Terah in chapter 11).

1. **The Table of Nations (Genesis 10):**

- It lists 70 nations, which are representative of *all* nations of the world. It's not intended as an exhaustive listing, but a representative one. As Mathews states, "these 70 nations are representative of all nations."
- It is organized according to ethno-linguistic, geopolitical, and ethno-geographic criteria. So it is based on language, territory, and associated people groups, not just strictly biological lineage. As Mathews puts it, "the table of nations is going to be gathered on the basis of the criteria of language, so it's ethno, ethnicity, and linguistic. Then we will find that it also involves geopolitical ideas...And then third, the ethnogeographic."
- The Table of Nations provides a "moral map" for the Hebrew readers, portraying the descendants of Ham as needing caution, whereas the Japhethites and Shemites are given more favorable perspectives. This does not necessarily mean a condemnation of the Hamites, but a recognition of different trajectories.
- The Table illustrates the interconnectedness of nations because all people come from the same source: Noah's family. "What brings them together is their humanity created in the image of God."
- The Table of Nations also demonstrates that God wants to bless all people groups, even traditional enemies of Israel (e.g., Babylon, Assyria, Egypt), and is working out His plan to redeem them all.

1. **Nimrod and Babylon:**

- The description of Nimrod in Genesis 10:8-11 is interpreted as a negative portrayal due to his association with Babylon. Dr. Mathews suggests, "I tend to agree with those who think what is taking place before the Lord is like what we find in chapter 6... describing the horrific sinfulness and depravity of the people...And that also here, it is not a positive, but a negative appraisal that was received before the Lord."
- Babylon is one of the arch-enemies of the Hebrews, and a symbol of rebellion against God in the text.

1. **The Tower of Babel (Genesis 11:1-9):**

- The structure of the narrative employs *inclusio* - it begins and ends with similar language, framing the story. The text speaks about the whole world having "one language and a common speech" (v.1) and then being scattered after God confuses their languages (v.9).
- The narrative is structured around a *chiasmus* or *chiastic structure*: the ascent and building of the tower (verses 1-4) followed by God's descent to see the city (verse 5). It's like a mirror image or a reversal.
- The key issue is not so much the tower itself, but the city of Babylon, which represents human pride and rebellion against God's plan. As Mathews says, "the narrative focuses more on the city than it does the edifice built, and that's the tower."
- The people's motive was to "make a name for themselves" (v.4), reflecting self-glorification rather than glorifying God.
- God's judgment is seen as an act of grace to prevent further rebellion. By confusing their languages and scattering them, He prevents them from fulfilling their prideful ambition and pushes them into fulfilling his original blessing: to be fruitful and fill the earth.

1. **Literary Devices:**

- **Wordplay:** The name "Babel" is a play on the Hebrew word "Ba'alal," meaning "to confuse," highlighting the chaotic nature of their rebellion.
- **Irony:** The tower was meant to reach the heavens, but God had to "come down" to see it, illustrating God's transcendence and mockery of human ambition.

- **Unity vs. Scattering:** The unified effort of the people is contrasted with God's scattering them after confusing their language.

1. **Theological Messages:**

- **The Threat of Pride:** The Tower of Babel serves as a warning against human pride and technological ambition that are not grounded in God's will.
- **False Unity:** Unity not based on God is ultimately destructive and rebellious. True unity is grounded in the common humanity and created in the image of God. Diversity among nations, working within that common human family, is a blessing from God.
- **God's Grace and Sovereignty:** God intervenes in human affairs to prevent humanity's self-destruction and to work out His ultimate plan of redemption. God's actions are not just judgement, but also provide a means for his original intent to be fulfilled.
- **The Need for a Deliverer:** The narrative highlights the need for a deliverer who will not rebel against God. The Shemite genealogy is a path to Abraham, who will become the father of God's chosen people.

1. **Reversal of Babel at Pentecost:**

- The event at Pentecost (Acts 2) is presented as a reversal of Babel. The Holy Spirit enabled the disciples to speak in other languages, demonstrating God's ability to overcome the divisions created at Babel and bring unity to the church. This is a "unity founded upon, grounded in the oneness of God," in contrast to the human-led and ultimately divisive unity at Babel.
- At Pentecost, the linguistic and ethnic diversity of the nations listed in Genesis 10 is brought together in a unified worship of God, demonstrating God's power to redeem and restore.

1. **Call to Personal Relationship:** The speaker concludes with a call for personal relationship with God, following the example of Enoch and Noah. He emphasizes that eternal life is to know the true God and the one he sent, Jesus Christ. True living involves submitting to God's will, not building our own "towers" of pride.

Conclusion: Genesis 10-11 presents a critical narrative about humanity's rebellion and God's response. The Table of Nations and the Tower of Babel story provide crucial context for understanding the transition to the more particularistic history of Abraham and God's chosen people. The session highlights the importance of understanding this

biblical history and responding to God's call to live in His kingdom. The session also points to a future in which the linguistic and cultural barriers erected at Babel will be overcome.

4. Study Guide: Mathews, Genesis, Session 9, The Nations and the Tower of Babel (Gen. 10:1-11:26)

Genesis 10-11: The Nations and the Tower of Babel Study Guide

Quiz

Instructions: Answer each question in 2-3 complete sentences.

1. What is the significance of Genesis 10-11 within the broader context of Genesis 1-11?
2. Explain the structural arrangement of Genesis 10 and 11, noting the relationship between the genealogies and the Tower of Babel narrative.
3. What are the two types of genealogies discussed in the text, and how do they differ?
4. How does the story of Noah and his sons (Shem, Ham, and Japheth) in chapter 9 relate to the Table of Nations in chapter 10?
5. Describe the purpose of the "colophons" found at the end of each family grouping in chapter 10.
6. What criteria were used to gather and present the various people groups in the Table of Nations?
7. Explain the significance of Nimrod's character within the Table of Nations.
8. What is the main theological message conveyed by the Tower of Babel narrative in chapter 11?
9. How does the Tower of Babel story relate to the original blessing given to humanity in Genesis 1:28 and 9:1,7?
10. According to the lecture, how does the events of Pentecost in Acts 2 relate to the Tower of Babel?

Quiz Answer Key

1. Genesis 10-11 concludes the universal history of humanity (Genesis 1-11) and gathers key theological ideas, such as the spread of nations and the consequences of human rebellion, while also transitioning into the specific history of Abraham. The narrative also creates a "moral map" where the descendants of Ham are to

be viewed with suspicion while the descendants of Shem are seen more favorably.

2. Genesis 10 contains a segmented genealogy of Noah's sons (Japheth, Ham, and Shem), followed by the narrative of the Tower of Babel (11:1-9), and then a linear genealogy of Shem (11:10-26). The Babel story is intentionally placed *after* the description of the spread of nations in Chapter 10.
3. There are two types of genealogies: segmented and linear. Segmented genealogies, like chapter 10, branch out to include multiple descendants of a patriarch, while linear genealogies, like chapters 5 and 11, show a direct lineage, naming one person per generation.
4. Noah's curse on Canaan, Ham's son, provides a moral map for the readers, portraying the descendants of Ham with some suspicion while the descendants of Shem and Japheth are viewed more favorably. This helps to create a context for how the different nations would have been viewed by the Israelite readers of the text.
5. The colophons are the concluding statements at the end of each family (Japhethites, Hamites, and Shemites) which include the criteria by which the various people groups were included. The colophons conclude a people group with mentions of their clans, languages, territories, and nations.
6. The Table of Nations was gathered on the basis of ethno-linguistic criteria (language), geopolitical ideas (territories and nations), and ethno-geographic ideas (geography of peoples). It is not a strictly biological genealogy but a representation of related people groups.
7. Nimrod is described as a mighty warrior and hunter whose actions are viewed negatively by the lecturer, due to his association with Babylon, a traditional enemy of Israel. The lecturer uses language that hints that Nimrod's acts are viewed negatively before God, much like the sin of mankind before the Flood.
8. The Tower of Babel narrative illustrates the dangers of human pride and the pursuit of false unity, and how God judges human pride by disrupting their unity and scattering them across the earth. Instead of seeking God's glory, the people sought to build a monument to themselves.
9. The Tower of Babel narrative reveals that the people were attempting to violate the blessing and command of God to spread and fill the earth, and instead they sought to remain united in one place. Their desire to make a name for themselves

rather than follow God's purpose represents a rejection of their role as God's stewards over the earth.

10. The events of Pentecost in Acts 2 are presented as a reversal of the confusion at Babel, where the Holy Spirit enables people to understand one another despite diverse languages. The Holy Spirit, in this story, enables people of various languages to understand one another, pointing towards a new unity found in the Lord.

Essay Questions

Instructions: Answer each of the following questions in a well-organized essay format.

1. Analyze the significance of the structure of Genesis 10 and 11 in conveying the author's theological message about human rebellion and God's purposes for humanity.
2. Explore the different perspectives on the interpretation of Nimrod within the Table of Nations and their implications for understanding the relationship between God and human power.
3. Compare and contrast the concepts of unity presented in the Tower of Babel narrative with the unity of the Church described in the New Testament.
4. Discuss how the themes of blessing, curse, and redemption are woven throughout Genesis 9-11 and how these themes impact our understanding of God's interaction with humanity.
5. Examine the literary techniques employed in the Tower of Babel narrative (e.g., inclusio, chiasmus, irony) and their contributions to the overall meaning of the story.

Glossary of Key Terms

- **Genealogy:** A record of descent from ancestors, often tracing family lineages or origins.
- **Segmented Genealogy:** A type of genealogy that branches out to include multiple descendants of a patriarch, such as what is found in Genesis 10.
- **Linear Genealogy:** A type of genealogy that shows a direct lineage by naming one person per generation, such as what is found in Genesis 5 and 11:10-26.
- **Colophon:** A concluding statement at the end of a text or section, often summarizing the content or purpose. These are used at the conclusion of each section in the table of nations in Genesis 10.
- **Table of Nations:** The list of descendants of Noah's sons in Genesis 10, detailing the origins and locations of various people groups after the flood.
- **Ethno-linguistic:** Relating to the combination of ethnicity and language, often used to describe how groups are identified and defined.
- **Geopolitical:** Relating to the combination of geography and political dynamics, often used in the study of nations and territories.
- **Ethnogeographic:** The geographical distribution of ethnic or people groups.
- **Inclusio:** A literary device in which a passage begins and ends with similar language, creating a sense of unity or "brackets."
- **Chiasmus (Chiastic Structure):** A literary device in which the elements of a text are arranged in a criss-cross pattern (A-B-C-B'-A'), often forming a mirror image.
- **Ziggurat:** A stepped, pyramid-like structure with a temple at the top, common in ancient Mesopotamia.
- **Hubris:** Excessive pride or self-confidence, often leading to a downfall or punishment.

5. FAQs on Mathews, Genesis, Session 9, The Nations and the Tower of Babel (Gen. 1-11:26), Biblealearning.org (BeL)

FAQ: Genesis 10-11 - The Table of Nations and the Tower of Babel

1. **What is the significance of the genealogies and the Tower of Babel narrative in Genesis 10-11?** These chapters conclude the universal history of humanity (Genesis 1-11) and introduce the transition to the more specific history of Abraham. The genealogies (the Table of Nations in chapter 10 and the genealogy of Shem in chapter 11) establish a background for the various people groups that will be encountered by Israel. The Tower of Babel narrative explains the dispersion of these people and the diversity of languages, highlighting humanity's rebellion against God's plan and the resulting consequences. They are important to understand God's plan to bring blessing and redemption through a specific line.
2. **Why are there two genealogies of Shem, and what is the difference between segmented and linear genealogies?** The genealogies in chapter 10 include the descendants of Shem, Ham, and Japheth, while chapter 11 provides a more focused, linear genealogy of Shem leading to Abraham. The emphasis on Shem stems from the covenant and blessing given to Shem and Japheth in Genesis 9, which contrasts with the curse on Canaan (Ham's son). A segmented genealogy, like in chapter 10, branches out, including multiple descendants of a patriarch, while a linear genealogy, like in chapter 11, traces a direct lineage, highlighting a single descendant per generation.
3. **What is the moral map provided by the Table of Nations, and how does it relate to the curse on Canaan?** The Table of Nations is not simply a list of people; it presents a "moral map." The Hamites, particularly the Canaanites, are viewed with suspicion due to Ham's disrespect for his father Noah. This does not mean all Hamites are condemned but rather it offers a lens for the Hebrew readers to understand the various people groups they will encounter in the land of Canaan, providing an interpretation of their origin and moral character. The curse on Canaan highlights how moral qualities can be passed down through families and influence relationships between different people groups.

4. **What is the significance of the 70 nations listed in Genesis 10, and what criteria are used to include them?** The 70 nations are representative of all the nations in the world. These are not exhaustive lists but rather representative groupings. The inclusion criteria are based on language, ethnicity, geopolitical ideas (territories and political groups), and ethno-geography. These criteria highlight the diversity of human culture and identity following the flood. The number 70, with its connection to the number 7 in the Bible, suggests a kind of completion and wholeness.
5. **How is the Tower of Babel narrative structured, and what is the significance of the *inclusio* and *chiasmus*?** The Tower of Babel narrative is structured with literary devices to emphasize its theological points. The use of *inclusio* is seen in the repetition of similar language at the beginning (one language) and the end (language confusion and scattering) of the narrative in Genesis 11:1 and 11:9, creating a "bracket" around the story. *Chiasmus* is a mirrored, or reversed structure, where events or themes are presented in a reversing sequence; here, the peoples' ascent to build a tower (11:1-4) is reversed by God's descent to scatter them (11:5-9), highlighting the reversal of human intentions.
6. **What are the primary theological messages conveyed by the Tower of Babel narrative?** The Tower of Babel story exposes human pride and the danger of false unity. The people attempted to build a tower not for God's glory, but to "make a name for themselves," rejecting God's intended plan to fill the earth with diverse people groups in different places. They sought unity, but this unity was not grounded in their common humanity created in God's image. They were united against God instead of in Him, so he dispersed them, resulting in their various languages. The narrative shows how God intervenes to prevent humanity from acting solely out of pride and self-interest, demonstrating God's grace in preserving His plans for humanity even amidst their rebellion. The narrative also contrasts their building using advanced technology and their self-reliance with God stepping in to save them from their own intentions.

7. **How does the Tower of Babel narrative connect with the events at Pentecost described in Acts chapter 2?** The scattering of languages at Babel is reversed at Pentecost. At Babel, human language was confused, creating division, whereas at Pentecost, the Holy Spirit enabled the disciples to speak in other languages, allowing people from different nations to hear the Gospel in their own tongues. This reversal shows God's power to unite people across cultural and linguistic barriers and the transformative effect of the Holy Spirit to overcome the divisions caused at Babel. Pentecost, by enabling people to hear God in their own languages, shows how God will bring all people groups into a single family, a unified church.
8. **What does the text say about God's relationship with the world after Babel, and how do these chapters emphasize the need for submission to God?** Following the dispersal of languages at Babel, God continues to oversee the development of the nations as detailed in the Table of Nations, showing that these nations still live under God's blessing, despite their rebellion. God's intent was always to bring people of all groups into the blessing. The Tower of Babel narrative serves as a reminder to not build our "own towers" of pride but to submit ourselves to God's will and to receive God's provision. This message is reinforced by the emphasis on the need for personal relationship with God, as seen in the examples of Enoch and Noah, and highlighted by the invitation to have eternal life in knowing God through Jesus Christ.