

After the flood – another chance

• **The Mesopotamian world**

• **Noah to Abraham**

After the flood, humankind gets another chance. God preserved the family of Noah and beginning with Noah’s family, the story of the human race begins again. Noah’s offspring spread all over the ancient Near East and even further.

Noah had three sons, Shem, Ham and Japheth.¹ The human race in Mesopotamia expanded and tribes and nations came into being. Genesis 10 tells us the story of where they went to. The chapter gives a ‘family tree’, with gaps in it, to explain the presence of various nations in the ancient Near East, all of whom descended from Noah. The flood must have been local, since there were humans in other parts of the world. Genesis 10 deals only with the Mesopotamian world, but in 5000–2000 BC there were plenty of people in other parts of the world who get no mention in Genesis 10.

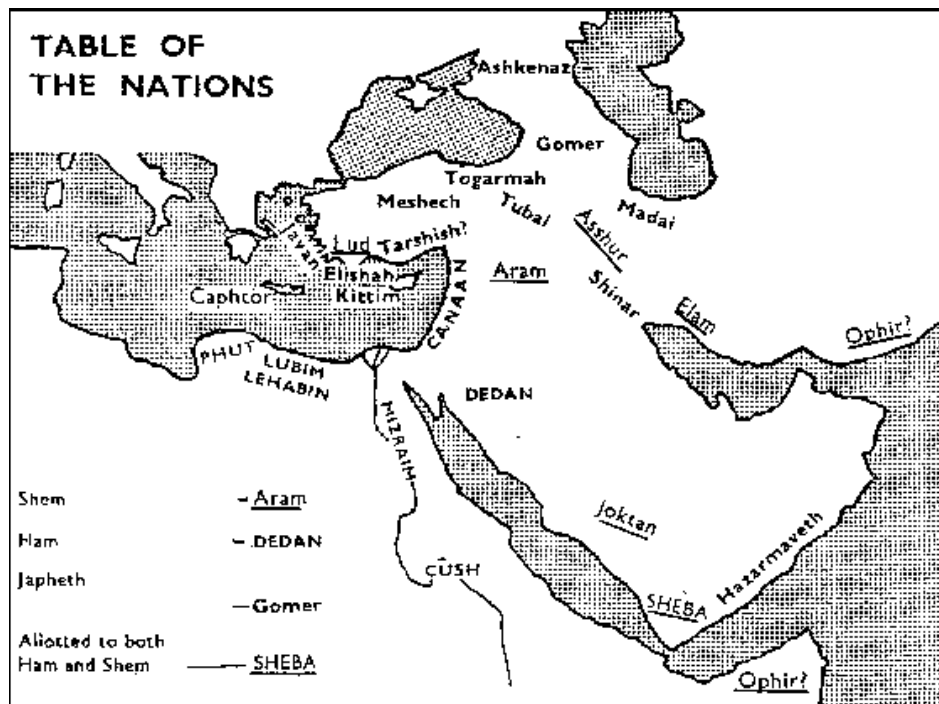
It deals with the period between Noah (maybe about 5000 BC) and Abraham (2000 BC), and beyond (for some of the nations are from the mid-second millennium, after Abraham). We have the lands which sprang from Japheth ¹, and from Ham ², and from Shem ³ (see Map 4).

¹ 10:1

¹ 10:2–5

² 10:6–20

³ 10:21–31



Map 4: The table of the nations

• **Japheth – North**

• **Ham – South West**

• **Shem – South East**

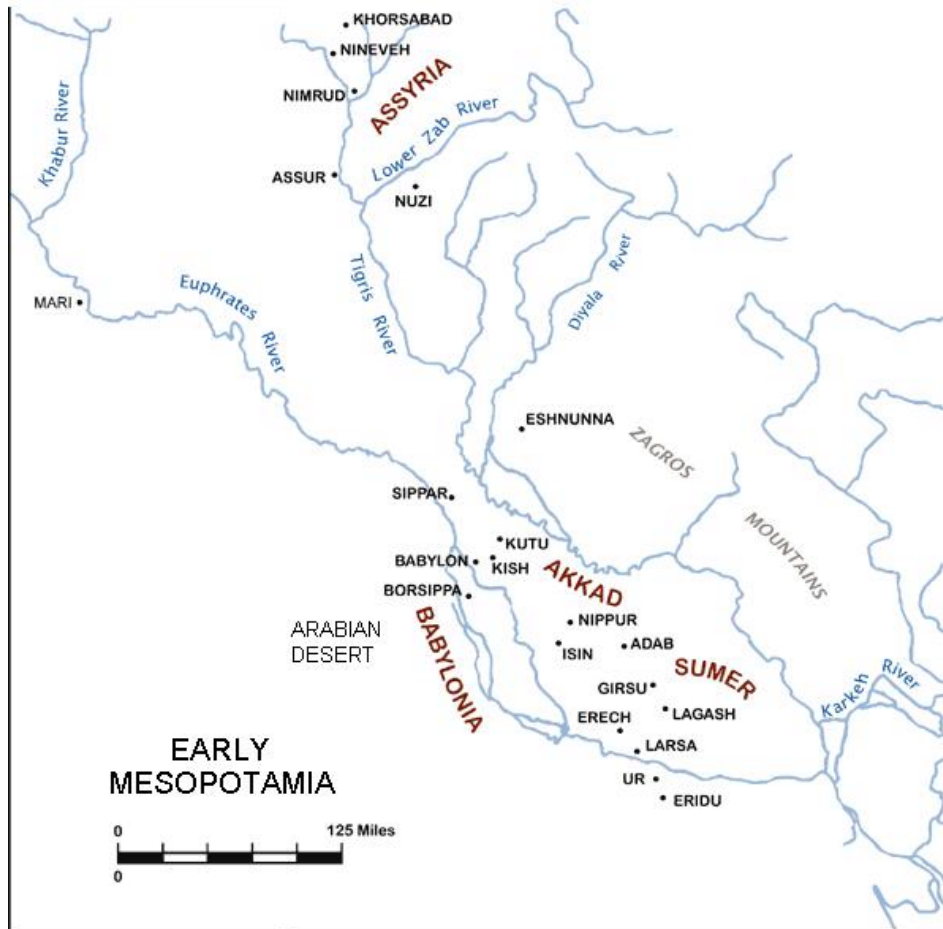
Coming from Japheth various nations emerged in the north. Coming from Ham nations emerged in the southwest including Egypt, Cush and the tribes of Canaan. Coming from Shem came nations in the direction of the south-east. Shem’s line is traced to six generations, Ham’s to four, and Japheth’s to three. This section included the forebears of Israel. The word ‘Semites’ comes from Shem’s name.

The ‘table of the nations’ must have been written some time in the 2nd millennium BC before it was incorporated into Genesis. ‘Nimrod’ perhaps dates in the middle of the second millennium.

1. Rising Imperialism

1. This piece of ancient Near Eastern history gives us a picture of rising imperialism. Not much is said about Japheth's line ¹, but out of Shem's line comes Cush (perhaps the same as Kish which is well-known to students of this period). From Cush came Nimrod, who is perhaps the same as Sargon of Accad who lived about 2300 BC.

¹ 10:2-5



Map 5: Mesopotamia

Nimrod – whoever he was – was the founder of a great empire which at first included Babylon, Erech, Akkad and Calneh, in the land of Shinar (i.e. Sumeria, Mesopotamia). Nimrod was an empire builder and warrior. He loved hunting. Babylonian and Assyrian kings are often pictured on the walls of ancient ruins as engaged in lion-hunting. Nimrod was perhaps the first of them, a warrior and hunter. He extended his empire to Assyria ¹ and built Nineveh, Calah, and others ² (see Map 5).

¹ 10:11

² 10:12

• **Ambitious for more power**

This is typical of powerful men. They like to ever extend their power and are greedy for more and more domains over which to rule. Nimrod was an imperialist, an empire-builder, ambitious to extend his kingdoms. The very name means 'We have rebelled' or 'Let us rebel'.

• **Mistakes repeated**

A second chance does not really help man. You would think that after the flood man would learn from his mistakes. 'Surely men and women will not wander into the same folly again' – one might think. Surely man will not rebel against God repeatedly. But people make the same mistakes all over again.

• **Desire to achieve and to be recognised**

Why are kings and rulers and generals so ambitious? Where does this international aggression come from? Why does one nation attack another nation? It is part of the restlessness of man. Men and women wish to have a purpose in life. They want to achieve something, and

get a name for themselves.

2. Rising degradation

2. **This history gives us a picture of rising degradation.** Names occur to us that are familiar from the story that we know is about to follow. Mizraim is another name for Egypt; it would become a people who persecuted the Israelites and kept them in bondage. Canaan, Sidon, Heth and others ^{☒1} remind us of the Canaanites, the Sidonians, the Hittites and peoples who would one day come under God's judgement because of their degradation. Sodom and Gomorrah and nearby city-states ^{☒2} became famous for their perversity.

^{☒1} 10:15-18

^{☒2} 10:19

3. Shem's line leads to the Saviour

3. **This history points to the line of Shem as the one leading to the Saviour** ^{☒1}. Japheth's line is traced to three generations, Ham's to four, but Shem's to six! This is because the story is moving rapidly towards Abraham in the line of Shem.

^{☒1} 10:22-31

• **Towards Abraham**


These were the nations that spread out in this part of the ancient world. It was in this near eastern world that the events of salvation would take place. The 'table of the nations' points in the direction of Abraham, and Abraham points us to the 'seed' of Abraham, Jesus our Saviour. There are seventy nations mentioned in Genesis 10. It is a kind of 'perfect number' in the thinking of ancient people. The seventy nations represented the entire world – even though there were human beings outside of these seventy. Yet 'the world', represented by seventy nations, was only interested in aggression and expansion and self-interest.

• **Seventy repeats the entire world**

• **Not a hunter but a Saviour**

On the day of Pentecost again the crowd represented 'every nation under heaven' ^{☒1}. A righteous empire could not be achieved by militarism but what militarism could not achieve would one day be achieved, not by a mighty hunter but by a mighty Saviour. It would lead not to the nations fragmenting into hostile kingdoms, but to representatives of the nations coming together to make a new empire, under the influence of the powerful Holy Spirit of God.

^{☒1} Acts 2:5

	<p>Dr Michael Eaton is highly respected internationally as a theologian, author, preacher and teacher. He lives in Kenya where he is one of the leaders of the Chrisco Fellowship. His <i>Preaching Through The Bible</i> (PTTB) books are highly popular worldwide. Michael Eaton puts the theological and practical meaning of the Bible in a clear and down-to-earth way so that what is written can be easily understood by the reader.</p>	
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