

Was The Dispersion At Babel A Real Event?

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When did the events at the Tower of Babel happen? What did the tower look like? Are there any records of Noah's descendants found throughout the world after they left Babel? What about different languages? Are Noah and his sons found in any ancient genealogies? In this chapter, we'll examine the fascinating answers to questions about what happened on the plain of Shinar. For background to this chapter, please read [*Genesis 10–11*](#).

When Did the Event at Babel Occur?

Renowned chronologist Archbishop James Ussher¹ placed the time of Babel at 106 years after the Flood, when Peleg was born.²

To Eber were born two sons: the name of one *was* Peleg, for in his days the earth was divided; and his brother's name *was* Joktan ([*Genesis 10:25*](#)).

Although this may not be the exact date, it is in range because Peleg was in the fourth generation after the Flood.

Some have suggested that this division refers to a geophysical splitting of the continents; however, this is associated with the flood of Noah's time—not the events at Babel. The massive amounts of water and the crustal breakup indicated in [*Genesis 7:11*](#) (the fountains of the great deep burst forth) were substantial enough to cause catastrophic movements of plates. Continental collision formations, such as high mountains, were already in place

prior to Peleg’s day. For example, we know the mountains of Ararat had formed by the end of the Flood because the ark landed there. These mountains are caused by a collision with the Arabian plate and the Eurasian plate. So these would have already moved by the time the Flood had ended.

Continental splitting during the day of Peleg would have caused another global flood! Instead, the division mentioned here refers to the linguistic division that happened when God confused the language at Babel. Even the Jewish historian Josephus (who lived near the time of Christ) stated:

He was called Peleg, because he was born at the dispersion of the nations to their various countries. . . .³

Prominent modern theologians such as John Whitcomb reaffirm this as well.⁴ According to Archbishop Ussher, the date of Babel would have been near 2242 B.C.⁵ See table 1 for a comparison to other events according to Ussher.

Table 1. Major Dates According to Ussher

Major event	Date (According to Ussher)
Creation	4004 B.C.
Global Flood	2348 B.C.
Tower of Babel	2242 B.C.
Call of Abraham	1921 B.C.
Time of the Judges (Moses was first)	1491 B.C. (God appeared to Moses in the burning bush)
Time of the Kings (Saul was the first)	1095 B.C.
Split Kingdom	975 B.C.
Christ Was Born	5 B.C.

It was during the days of Peleg that the family groups left the plain of Shinar and traveled to different parts of the world, taking with them their own language that other families couldn't understand. Not long after this, Babylon (2234 B.C.), Egypt (2188 B.C.), and Greece (2089 B.C.) began.⁶ Civilizations that were closer to Babel (e.g., those in the Middle East) were established prior to civilizations farther from Babel (e.g., those in Australia or the Americas).

Even more fascinating is that as people went around the world, they left evidence of this event! Let's take a look.

Ziggurats Throughout The World

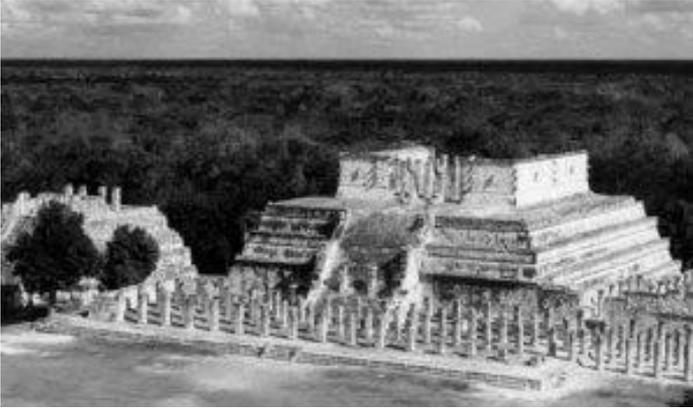


The Tower of Babel has traditionally been depicted as a type of ziggurat, although the Bible doesn't give specific dimensions. The Hebrew word for *tower* used in [Genesis 11](#), referring to the Tower of Babel, is *migdal*: a tower; by analogy, a rostrum; figuratively, a (pyramidal) bed of flowers.

Interestingly, this word means *tower* but figuratively reflects a flowerbed that yields a *pyramidal* shape. This gives a little support

to the idea that the Tower of Babel may have been pyramidal or ziggurat shaped.

In what is now Iraq, Robert Koldewey excavated a structure some think to be the foundation of the original Tower of Babel. It underlays a later ziggurat that was thought to be built by Hammurabi in the 19th century B.C.⁷



When people were scattered from the Tower of Babel in the time of Peleg, they likely took this building concept with them to places all over the world. It makes sense that many of the families that were scattered from Babel took varying ideas of the tower to their new lands and began building projects of their own.

Ziggurats, pyramids, mounds, and the like have been found in many parts of the world—from Mesopotamia to Egypt to South America. The ancient Chinese built pyramids and the Mississippian culture built mounds. Pyramids are classed slightly differently from ziggurats, as are mounds, but the similarities are striking.

Why did the people at Shinar build a tower? Some suspect that they were afraid of another flood, similar to the one that Noah and his sons had informed them about. However, Dr. John Gill casts doubt on this idea.

It is generally thought what led them to it was to secure them from another flood, they might be in fear of; but this seems not likely, since they had the covenant and oath of God, that the earth should never be destroyed by water anymore; and besides, had this been the thing in view, they would not have chosen a plain to build on, a plain that lay between two of the greatest rivers, Tigris, and Euphrates, but rather one of the highest mountains and hills they could have found: nor could a building of brick be a sufficient defense against such a force of water, as the waters of the flood were; and besides, but few at most could be preserved at the top of the tower, to which, in such a case, they would have betook themselves.⁸

The Bible records that the people said among themselves:

Come, let us build ourselves a city, and a tower whose top is in the heavens; let us make a name for ourselves, lest we be scattered abroad over the face of the whole earth. (*Genesis 11:4*)



It seems that the tower was to be a special place to keep people together, rather than filling the earth as God had commanded them to (*Genesis 9:1*). It is possible that the tower was built under the guise that it was a place for sacrifice unto God. This would have prevented people from going too far since they would have to come back to offer sacrifices at Babel.

A recurring theme in Scripture is that people seek to do things they think will honor God but end up disobeying God. One example is when Saul offered a sacrifice when he wasn't supposed to ([1 Samuel 13:8-13](#)). It is better to obey than sacrifice. In fact, many ziggurats and pyramids around the world were used for sacrifice or other sacred religious events, such as burying people (e.g., pharaohs of Egypt). Perhaps the concept of sacred sacrifice and religious festivities with ziggurats was a carryover from Babel.

Regardless, ziggurats and pyramids all over the world are an excellent confirmation of the original recorded in God's Word—the Tower of Babel.

Noah In Royal Genealogies Of Europe

Table of Nations
Genesis 10

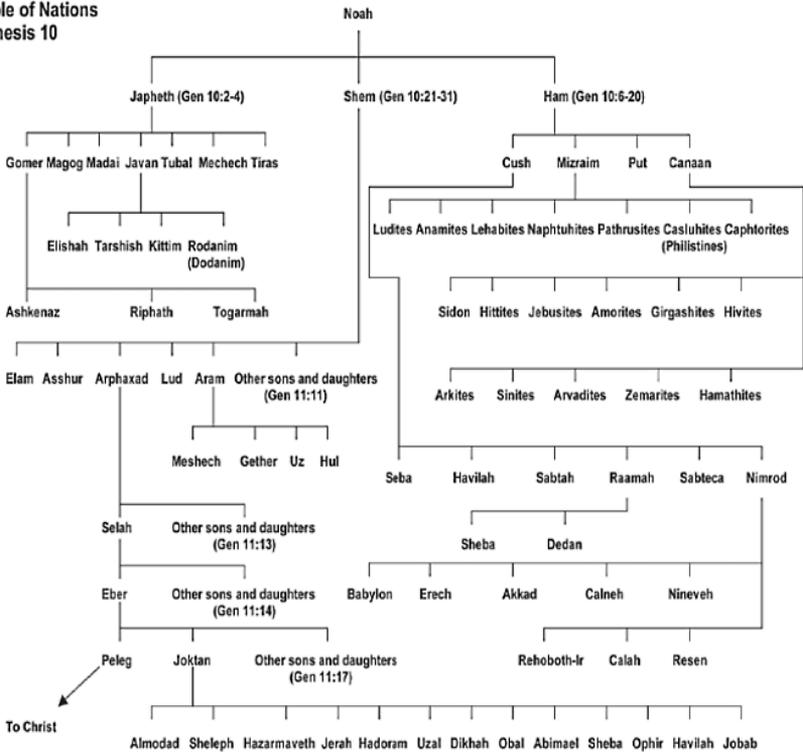


Table 2. Biblical Table of Nations

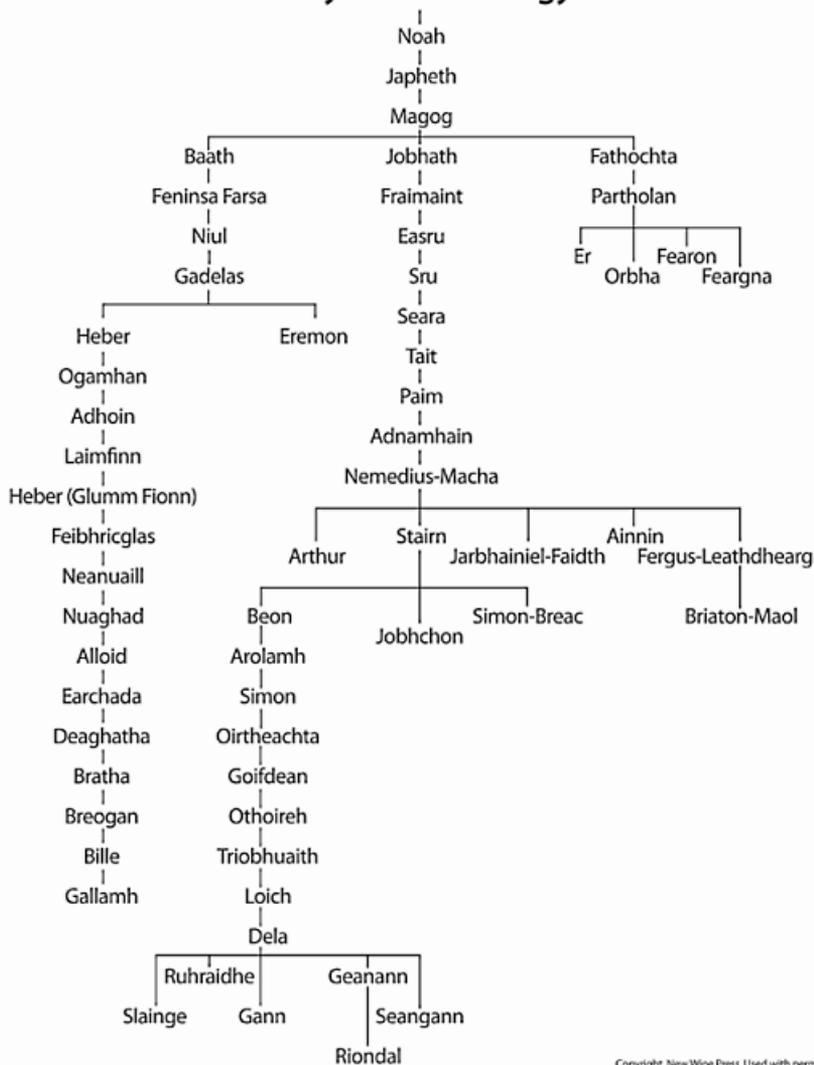
The Bible in *Genesis 10* gives an outline of family groups that left Babel (see table 2).

These people moved throughout the world and populated virtually every continent. (Was Antarctica ever settled in the past? At this point I am unaware.) Historians have commented on genealogical records in the past and other ancient documents on the origins of various peoples.²

Table 3. Irish Genealogies

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Early Irish Genealogy

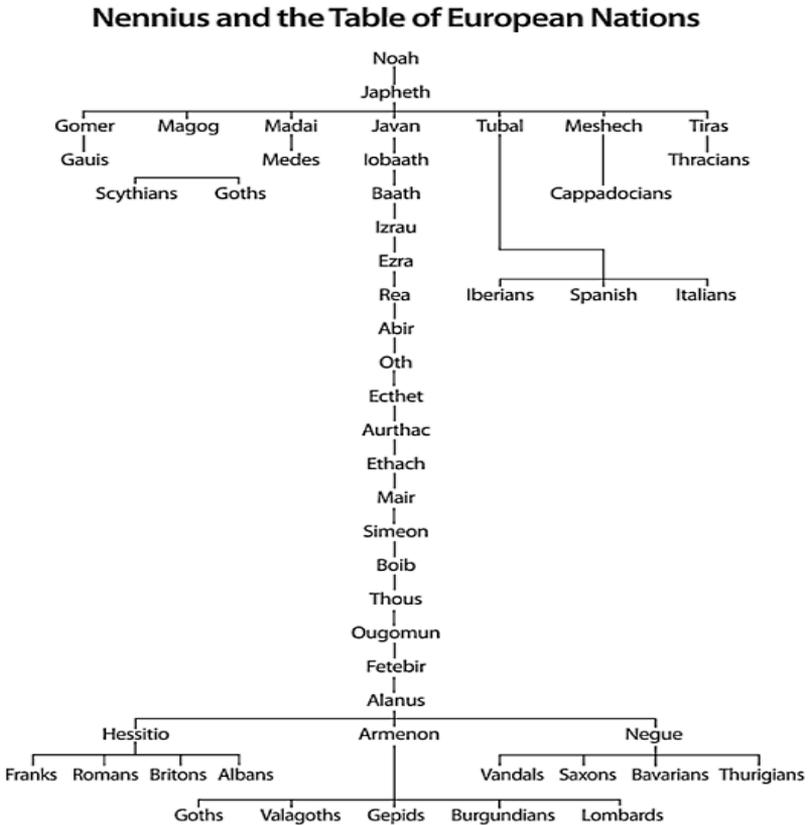


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These genealogies seem to connect prominent modern houses and royal lines with the Table of Nations listed in the Bible. In these genealogies, Noah is found on the top of the lists on many of these documents, some of which feature variant spellings such as *Noe*, *Noa*, and *Noah*.

One historian discovered a relationship between the ancient name of *Sceaf* (*Seskef*, *Scef*) and the biblical *Japheth*.¹⁰ This seems reasonable, as Japheth has traditionally been seen as the ancestor of the European nations. Most of the European genealogies researched have a variant of *Sceaf* with the exception of Irish genealogies, which still used the name *Japheth*. The Irish genealogical chart is reprinted in table 3.¹¹

Table 4. Nennius’s Table of Nations
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Anglo-Saxon chronologies feature six royal houses.¹² An eighth century Roman historian, Nennius, developed a table of nations of the lineages of many of the European people groups from Noah’s son Japheth: Gauls, Goths, Bavarians, Saxons, and Romans. Nennius’s table of nations is reproduced in table 4.¹³

Though it repeats the Goths in two different areas, Nennius’s chart bears strong similarities to the history that Josephus recorded,¹⁴ as well as the Bible’s Table of Nations. However, there are clearly enough differences to show that it was neither a copy from the biblical text nor from the Jewish historian Josephus.¹⁵

Chinese records also describe *Nuah* with three sons, *Lo Han*, *Lo Shen*, and *Jahphu*, according to the Miautso people of China.¹⁶ Although original documents of ancient sources sometimes no longer exist and one has to rely on quotes from other ancient books, it is interesting how in many places we find similarities to the Table of Nations given in the Bible.

Noah’s Grandsons’ Names Are Everywhere!

History abounds with names that are reused. Names of places become names of people; names of people become names of places. After the Flood, several of Noah’s descendants were named for places prior to the Flood. See table 5 for a list.

Table 5. A Few Pre-Flood and Post-Flood References

Name	Bible Reference Pre-Flood	Bible Reference Post-Flood	Person
Havilah	<u>Genesis 2:11</u>	<u>Genesis 10:7</u> , <u>Genesis 10:29</u>	Noah’s grandson through Ham; Noah’s great, great, great, great grandson

			through Shem.
Cush	<u>Genesis 2:13</u>	<u>Genesis 10:6</u>	Noah's grandson through Ham
Asshur	<u>Genesis 2:14</u>	<u>Genesis 10:22</u>	Noah's grandson through Shem

Names may vary throughout history. For example, Pennsylvania was named for William Penn; St. Petersburg in Russia was named for Peter the Great, who was ultimately named for Peter who penned two books of the Bible. Names can undergo many changes such as variations in spelling, differences in symbols, and alterations in pronunciation.

Despite any changes, however, the names of post-Flood regions, cities, rivers, or languages should bear similarity to the names of those leaving Babel. One would be surprised how often these names appear. Table 6 lists some of these.

Table 6. Noah's Descendants' Names Reflected Around the World¹⁷

Name	Descendant of Noah	What Is It?
Aramaic	Aram	Language that came out of Babel and still survives, likely with changes down the ages. Some short parts of the Bible are written in Aramaic. Jesus spoke it on the cross when He said: "ELOI, ELOI, LAMA SABACHTHANI?" (<u>Mark 15:34</u>).
Cush	Cush	Ancient name of Ethiopia. In fact, people of Ethiopia still call themselves Cushites.
Medes	Madai	People group often associated with the

		Persians.
Ashkenaz	Ashkenaz	Still the Hebrew name for Germany.
Galacia, Gaul, and Galicia	Gomer	These regions are the old names for an area in modern Turkey, France, and Northwestern Spain, respectively, where Gomer was said to have lived. His family lines continued to spread across southern Europe. The Book of Galatians by Paul was written to the church at Galatia.
Gomeraeg	Gomer	This is the old name for the Welsh language on the British Isles from their ancestor, Gomer, whose ancestors began to populate the Isle from the mainland.
Javan	Javan	This is still the Hebrew name for Greece. His sons, Elishah, Tarshish, Kittim (Chittim), and Dodanim still have reference to places in Greece. For example, Paul, the author who penned much of the New Testament, was from the region of Tarshish (<i>Acts 21:39</i>) and a city called Tarsus. Jeremiah mentions Kittim in <i>Jeremiah 2:10</i> and is modern-day Cyprus (and other nearby ancient regions that now had varied names such as Cethim, Citius, Cethima, Cilicia). The Greeks worshiped Jupiter Dodanaeus from Japheth/Dodanim. The Elysians, were ancient Greek people.
Meshech/ Moscow	Mechech	Mechech is the old name for Moscow, Russia, and one region called the Mechech Lowland still holds the original name today.
Canaan	Canaan	The region of Palestine that God

		removed from the Canaanites for their sin and gave as an inheritance to the Israelites beginning with the conquest of Joshua. It is often termed the Holy Land and is where modern-day Israel resides.
Elamites	Elam	This was the old name for the Persians prior to Cyrus.
Assyria	Asshur	Asshur is still the Hebrew name for Assyria.
Hebrew	Eber	This people group and language was named for Eber. Abraham was a Hebrew, and the bulk of the Old Testament is written in Hebrew.
Taurus/ Toros	Tarshish	A mountain range in Turkey. Tanais is the old name of the Don River flowing into the Black Sea.
Mizraim	Mizraim	This is still the Hebrew name for Egypt.

We Don't Speak The Same Language Anymore!

The Tower of Babel explains why everyone doesn't speak the same language today.

There are over 6,900 spoken languages in the world today.¹⁸ Yet the number of languages emerging from Babel at the time of the dispersion would have been much less than this—likely less than 100 different original language families.

So where did all these languages come from? Linguists recognize that most languages have similarities to other languages. Related languages belong to what are called *language families*. These original language families (probably less than 100) resulted from God's confusion of the language at Babel. Since that time, the

original language families have grown and changed into the abundant number of languages today.

Noah's great-great-grandson Eber fathered Peleg when the events at Babel took place. The modern language of Hebrew is named after Eber. Noah's grandson Aram was the progenitor of Aramaic. The Bible lists Noah's grandsons, great-grandsons, great-great-grandsons, and great-great-great-grandsons who received a language at Babel in [Genesis 10](#). Eber and Aram were but two!

From Japheth ([Genesis 10:2-5](#)) came at least 14 language families; from Ham ([Genesis 10:6-20](#)), 39; from Shem ([Genesis 10:22-31](#)), at least 25 (excluding Peleg and other children who may have just been born). The total number of languages that may have come out of Babel according to [Genesis 10](#) may have been at least 78, assuming Noah, Ham, Shem, Japheth, and Peleg didn't receive a new language. This excludes some descendants of Shem who are given slight mention in [Genesis 11:11-17](#); they may have also received a language.

Both *Vistawide World Languages and Cultures*¹⁹ and *Ethnologue*,²⁰ companies that provide statistics on language, agree that only 94 languages families have been so far ascertained. With further study in years to come, this may change, but this figure is well within the range of families that dispersed from Babel ([Genesis 10](#)).

Is it feasible for 7,000 languages to develop from less than 100 in 4,000 years? The languages that came out of the confusion at Babel were "root languages" or language families. Over time, those root languages have varied by borrowing from other languages, developing new terms and phrases, and losing previous words and phrases.

Let's look at changes in the English language, as an example. English has changed so much over the course of 1,000 years that

early speakers would hardly recognize it today. Table 7 provides a look at the changes in *Matthew 6:9*.

Table 7.²¹

Beginning of <i>Matthew 6:9</i>	Date
Our Father who art in heaven and/or Our Father who is in heaven	Late Modern English (1700s)
Our father which art in heauen	Early Modern English (1500–1700) (KJV 1611)
Oure fader that art in heuenis	Middle English (1100– 1500)
Fæder ure þu þe eart on heofonum	Old English (c. A.D. 1000)

Just as English has changed significantly over the past 1,000 years, it becomes easy to see how the original languages at Babel could have rapidly changed in the 4,000 years since that time, whether spoken or written.

In conclusion, there exist a great many confirmations of the Bible’s account of the Tower of Babel and what happened as a result. Even stories about a tower and sudden language changes appear in ancient histories from Sumerian, Grecian, Polynesian, Mexican, and Native American sources.²² This is what we would expect since the Tower of Babel was a real event. Language changes, ziggurats, names of Noah found throughout the world, and tower legends are excellent confirmations of the events at Babel.

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Footnotes

1. James Ussher, *The Annals of the World*, trans. Larry and Marion Pierce (Green Forest, AR: Master Books, 2003), p. 22.

2. The use of Ussher's dates are not an across-the-board endorsement of his work. We recognize that any human work contains errors; however, Ussher meticulously researched biblical and ancient history, and we are comfortable with using many of the dates he proposed.
3. William Whiston, *The Works of Josephus Complete and Unabridged* (Peabody, MA: Hendrickson Publishers, 1987), p. 37.
4. John Whitcomb, "Babel," *Creation*, June 2002, p. 31–33, online at www.answersingenesis.org/creation/v24/i3/babel.asp.
5. Ussher, *The Annals of the World*, p. 22. Larry Pierce, "In the Days of Peleg," *Creation*, December 1999, p. 46–49.
6. David Down, "Ziggurats in the News," *Archaeological Diggings*, March–April 2007, p. 3–7.
7. Note on [Genesis 11:4](#) in: John Gill, D.D., *An Exposition of the Old and New Testament; The Whole Illustrated with Notes, Taken from the Most Ancient Jewish Writings* (London: printed for Mathews and Leigh, 18 Strand, by W. Clowes, Northumberland-Court, 1809). Edited, revised, and updated by Larry Pierce, 1994–1995 for The Word CD-ROM.
8. Nennius, *Historia Brittonum*, edited in the 10th century by Mark the Hermit, with English version by the Rev. W. Gunn, rector of Irstead, Norfolk, printed in London, 1819; Flavius Josephus, *The Complete Works of Flavius Josephus the Jewish Historian* (~100 A.D.), translated by William Whiston (~1850 A.D.) (Green Forest, AR: Master Books, 2008).
9. Bill Cooper, *After the Flood* (Chichester, England: New Wine Press, 1995), p. 92–96.
10. *Ibid.*, p. 108.
11. *Ibid.*, p. 84–86.
12. *Ibid.*, p. 49.
13. Whiston, *The Works of Josephus Complete and Unabridged*, p. 36–37.
14. Cooper, *After the Flood*, chapter 3.

15. Edgar Traux, "Genesis According to the Miao People," *Impact*, April 1991, online at www.icr.org/article/341/.
16. Information in this table comes from the following sources: Whiston, *The Works of Josephus Complete and Unabridged*, p. 36–37; Cooper, *After the Flood*, p. 170–208; Harold Hunt, "The Sixteen Grandsons of Noah," *Creation*, September 1998, p. 22–25, online at www.answersingenesis.org/creation/v20/i4/noah.asp.
17. Vistawide, "World Language Families," www.vistawide.com/languages/language_families_statistic_s1.htm.
18. Ibid.
19. Ethnologue, "Statistical Summaries," www.ethnologue.com/ethno_docs/distribution.asp?by=family.
20. Comparison of *Matthew 6:9*, Mansfield University, faculty.mansfield.edu/bholtman/holtman/101/GmcVaterunser.pdf.
21. Pam Sheppard, "Tongue-Twisting Tales," *Answers*, April–June 2008, p.56–57.