



Genesis – Chapter 11:1-32 The Tower of Babel (Lesson #21)

As we come to chapter 11, we are coming to the cause of chapter 10. Chapter 11 provides the answer as to why there are multiple languages on the planet.

“1 ¶ Now the whole earth had one language and the same words. 2 And as people migrated from the east, they found a plain in the land of Shinar and settled there. 3 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. 4 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.””

Vs 1 - Clearly this described an earlier time. This was a very different time than the time after this where the nations and languages will be divided.

Today, there are **6000 – 7000 languages**. Scholars speculate, postulate, and indeed blaviate, about the genesis of the languages, but they really have no idea.

The Bible tells us that there was a time when there was one language! The Bible goes on to explain **why** we now have **multiple languages**.

This described a time, coming off the ark and following when everyone was speaking the same language. This makes sense to us. Obviously, Noah and all his sons (and their wives) were speaking the same language.

You see if believe in the flood and only 8 survived, then an obvious conclusion is that those 8 people spoke the same language! It is only logical to believe that they taught their children the one language they knew.

This is a time when, **ALL THE EARTH HAD ONE LANGUAGE** and the same **WORDS!**

Vs 2 - Now there is something we don't know when we read *“as people migrated from the east, they...”*

Two questions likely come to mind:

- 1) Did **all people** (without exception) **migrate together**? Maybe. Were there some that were not part of this migration? We cannot be sure one way or the other. But it seems many, possibly most, did.

We should at least suspect or maybe hope that some nations were following God's mandate: *“Be fruitful and multiply and fill the earth...”* (Gen 9:1b, ESV).

- 2) Next, we are told as people **migrated from the east**, as they journeyed east, this would have likely been, we might imagine east of where the ark landed.

Also, when we go back to the landing of the ark we are told that it landed in the **mountains of Ararat** it leaves two possibilities:

- 1) Did they first head east of the ark?
- 2) Is Mount Ararat where the ark landed a different mountain than the one we call Ararat today?

We are then told that they settled in the land of Shinar. The land of Shinar is not only where they settled this is also the location (of the future city of Babylon).

The Greeks called this area Mesopotamia, meaning between the rivers (Tigris and the Euphrates). This is in modern day **Iraq**. This was a very fertile plain between these two rivers.

So it seems they were wondering, collectively, at least some type of loose collection until they came to this extremely fertile region. Having settled here they built into a community.

As we discussed last week, Shinar and Babel are the same area and indeed possibly the **same city** where we will find the southern tribes go into Babylonian captivity in **586BC** for **70 years**:

“1 In the third year of the reign of Jehoiakim king of Judah, Nebuchadnezzar king of Babylon came to Jerusalem and besieged it. 2 And the Lord gave Jehoiakim king of Judah into his hand, with some of the vessels of the house of God. And he brought them to the land of Shinar, to the house of his god, and placed the vessels in the treasury of his god.” (Da 1:1-2 ESV)

Vs 3 - So as some or many are **migrating**, as they are **spreading out**. As they are fulfilling the blessing that God blessed them with.

Here some or many having settled and building community, they then say to one another - Let us make bricks to make lasting buildings. They harden bricks and use them in the place of stones.

Now if we understand the connection between Genesis 10 and 11 correctly, it is likely **Nimrod**, who is heading up the let's settle down here, make bricks, and build strong lasting buildings.

Let's build a **single massive society** here, in Mesopotamia in the land of Shinar. This idea is likely being heralded by **Nimrod**. Let's build. Now at this point, we do not necessarily see a problem.

Vs 4 - Here, this initial desire takes a totally different feel and purpose.

Let's make a **city**, and a central part of this city will be a **tower**, the goal of this tower will be for its **top to reach into the heavens**, in doing this we will make a **name for ourselves**.

Under **Nimrod's leadership** they fire up the **brick making business**. They set out to build a **strong city**, and as a **central part of this city**, they plan to build a **tower** that goes into the heavens, or it could be a tower with a top **dedicated to the heavens**.

We might say the purpose of this tower was to reach into the heavens. This was their **“stairway to heaven”** this was their way to **ascend into the heavens**. This was their **gateway to God** and to **God's throne**. That was the idea they had in mind.

Many believe this was not simply a tower, **but a temple!** I am not sure what your mind is imagining, but imagine a tower, with a top **dedicated to the heavens**.

This was yet another attempt for man to be God. There are those who believe that worshipping the celestial bodies was also part of what was going on here.

We can imagine this tower would have a prominent position in the city and it would serve as a symbol of their unity and strength! **Ultimately, they want to make a name for themselves!**

APPLICATION: You see, you and I are here today, not to glorify our name, but God.

“Pride goes before destruction, and a haughty spirit before a fall.” (Pr 16:18 ESV)

5 “God opposes the proud but gives grace to the humble. 6 Humble yourselves, therefore, under the mighty hand of God so that at the proper time he may exalt you,” (1Pe 5b:5-6 ESV)

5 And the LORD came down to see the city and the tower, which the children of man had built. 6 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. 7 Come, let us go down and there confuse their language, so that they may not understand one another's speech." 8 So the LORD dispersed them from there over the face of all the earth, and they left off building the city. 9 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.

Vs 5 - Once again, this is **anthropomorphic language** or more specifically **anthropomorphic satire**, for God did not need to come down to see anything. He knew everything that was happening. Equally, man intended to **build into the heavens**, but God had to **lower himself** to see what **man was up to!**

We catch the satire. Man, has such a lofty view of himself and his achievements, but God must condescend to **"come down"** to see what puny man is up to!

God "comes down" to the city, likely expanding every day and the tower, likely being used to worship the heavens.

I cannot help but wonder, if here the worship of the creator had been perverted into a worship of the creation!

Here we see the greatness of God and the smallness of man! God came down, to see what man was accomplishing under the leadership of Nimrod and in defiance of God commands.

APPLICATION: This is surely a picture of **work's based righteousness**. This is a picture of all **false religions** which are working to get to God, rather than receiving God's method of reconciliation in Jesus Christ!

We are **unable to bridge the gap** and instead **Jesus bridges that gap** and offers us his righteousness:

"21 But now the righteousness of God has been manifested apart from the law, although the Law and the Prophets bear witness to it — 22 the righteousness of God through faith in Jesus Christ for all who believe. For there is no distinction:" (Ro 3:21-22 ESV)

One more thing: Josephus, a Jewish/Roman historian of Jewish descent said this in **Antiquities: 1.4.2:**

Now it was Nimrod who excited them to such an affront and contempt of God. He was the grandson of Ham, the son of Noah, a bold man, and of great strength of hand. He persuaded them not to ascribe it to God, as if it was through his means they were happy, but to believe that it was their own courage which procured that happiness. He also gradually changed the government into tyranny, seeing no other way of turning men from the fear of God, but to bring them into a constant dependence on his power. He also said he would be revenged on God, if he should have a mind to drown the world again; for that he would build a tower too high for the waters to be able to reach! and that he would avenge himself on God for destroying their forefathers!

Now Josephus is not scriptures, but he does represent Jewish thought in his day.

I suspect that Nimrod was not conered with protecting the world from a possible second flood. I suspect he wanted to be God. He wanted to dethrone God. He wanted to be equal with God and he had most of mankind behind him on the venture!

Vs 6 - Yahweh speaks, this could be communication within the Godhead, but clearly revealed by God to Moses or one of the early patriarchs.

God says: They are one, namely they have one language, they can all work together, for evil.

This is only the beginning of what they can or what they will do.

The potential evil... Vs 6b - ***And nothing that they propose to do will now be impossible for them.***

APPLICATION: Now let's bring this forward and make a clear application. If there is only one government on planet earth, and that government falls into the wrong hands, man's potential for evil is vastly increased. Now imagine if the world had one language, the potential for evil is nearly unlimited!

Of course, God knew this. But He wants you and I to know it. He wants us to understand it. Man is **NOT innately good**. Man is **innately sinful**.

The global flood and the ark were a radical rescue plan, but they had not fixed man's problem, here only a few generations after the flood, **man is blossoming in rebellion again!**

Now as you think about this it reminds us of what God saw of man prior to sending the flood. (Gen 6:5):

"The LORD saw that the wickedness of man was great in the earth, and that every intention of the thoughts of his heart was only evil continually." (Ge 6:5 ESV)

You see sin is the problem. A worldwide government lead by an evil person would result in tyranny. If you think I am kidding imagine someone like Hitler running the planet!

Vs 7 - Notice, let **us go**. **Who is the us?** Here in Genesis 11, we see hints of the **triune Godhead**.

Here we see plurality in the God-head.

APPLICATION: The triune nature of the ONE God is a mystery. This will not be developed until the New Testament, but here in veiled form, the Hebrews were being exposed to the idea that would be developed in the New Testament, namely that God is one, yet exists in three personages.

Let us go down... Again **anthropomorphic language**. God does not need to go anywhere, but he is taking action, He is taking judicial steps.

The reason for the godhead "**going down**" is to **confuse the languages**, to **divide the languages**, to take a step that will result in an end to the work.

Now we get the irony here, man is building to the heavens, God has to come down, God condescends to come down to man.

For Yahwey is going to confuse the languages: "***so that they may not understand one another's speech.***"

So there was **one language**, up until this point. How many languages, following this event. Of course, we cannot be sure, but we can **imagine many**. The nations were divided by their languages. I would suspect at this point at least 70, this is based on the **70 nations**.

Vs 8 - Yahweh, divided the languages, confused the tongues, and this resulted in the collapse of communications and the ending of the massive building project.

For here is the cause of what we read in Genesis 10.

They stopped off building the city, they stopped off in the use of the tower, at least for many and that would include Nimrod, for we read of Nimrod in chapter 10:

"8 Cush fathered Nimrod; he was the first on earth to be a mighty man. 9 He was a mighty hunter before the LORD. Therefore it is said, "Like Nimrod a mighty hunter before the LORD." 10 The beginning of his kingdom was Babel, Erech, Accad, and Calneh, in the land of Shinar. 11 From that land he went into Assyria and built Nineveh, Rehoboth-Ir, Calah, and" (Ge 10:8-11 ESV)

We can imagine what this might have looked like, when workers could no longer understand their foreman. When coworkers could no longer understand one another. In the palace, servants could no longer understand Nimrod.

In the tower of Babel, whatever went on day to day came to a screeching halt!

They **broke into groups** (likely family groups) that had a **common language**. Over time each family became a tribe and moved away from others they could no longer understand.

We can imagine some nations grew and became very powerful, while others, maybe not as much. We can imagine battles and skirmishes over the best land and resources.

As they migrated, they developed a distinct culture with distinctive physical and biological features, although all human, all still able to mate.

This is the genesis of what we call races or people groups, often with distinctive skin colors, heights, hair color, facial features, etc.

Overtime many men would learn other languages and would marry into other tribes and families. **But God's division was permanent.**

Before moving on from this point, God promises a time when:

"For at that time I will change the speech of the peoples to a pure speech, that all of them may call upon the name of the LORD and serve him with one accord." (Zep 3:9 ESV)

Vs 9 - Here we are told **why** this old city picked up the name it picked up. It began to be referred to as **בבל (Babel)** – which means literally **confusing** or **mixing**.

Lest we miss the point: For it was there, in the land of Shinar, in Mesopotamia, that Yahweh **"confused"** or **"mixed"** the languages.

It was there, from the city that would pick up the name **Babel**, that the Lord **"dispersed"** the people all over the face of the earth! By the way, the Hebrew word translated **"dispersed"** here is almost always translated **"scattered."**

Notice, he scattered them, he dispersed them across the whole earth! This explains all the nations we saw in Genesis 10 and why things are the way they are today.

10 These are the generations of Shem. When Shem was 100 years old, he fathered Arpachshad two years after the flood. 11 And Shem lived after he fathered Arpachshad 500 years and had other sons and daughters. 12 When Arpachshad had lived 35 years, he fathered Shelah. 13 And Arpachshad lived after he fathered Shelah 403 years and had other sons and daughters. 14 When Shelah had lived 30 years, he fathered Eber. 15 And Shelah lived after he fathered Eber 403 years and had other sons and daughters. 16 When Eber had lived 34 years, he fathered Peleg. 17 And Eber lived after he fathered Peleg 430 years and had other sons and daughters. 18 When Peleg had lived 30 years, he fathered Reu. 19 And Peleg lived after he fathered Reu 209 years and had other sons and daughters. 20 When Reu had lived 32 years, he fathered Serug. 21 And Reu lived after he fathered Serug 207 years and had other sons and daughters. 22 When Serug had lived 30 years, he fathered Nahor. 23 And Serug lived after he fathered Nahor 200 years and had other sons and daughters. 24 When Nahor had lived 29 years, he fathered Terah. 25 And Nahor lived after he fathered Terah 119 years and had other sons and daughters. 26 When Terah had lived 70 years, he fathered Abram, Nahor, and Haran. 27 ¶ Now these are the generations of Terah.

Terah fathered Abram, Nahor, and Haran; and Haran fathered Lot. 28 Haran died in the presence of his father Terah in the land of his kindred, in Ur of the Chaldeans. 29 And Abram and Nahor took wives. The name of Abram's wife was Sarai, and the name of Nahor's wife, Milcah, the daughter of Haran the father of Milcah and Iscah. 30 Now Sarai was barren; she had no child. 31 Terah took Abram his son and Lot the son of Haran, his grandson, and Sarai his daughter-in-law, his son Abram's wife, and they went forth together from Ur of the Chaldeans to go into the land of Canaan, but when they came to Haran, they settled there. 32 The days of Terah were 205 years, and Terah died in Haran."

Here the writer takes us back to Genesis 10 and provides additional details with additional information. Information that was not included in the descendants of Ham of Japeth.

Vs 10-11 - Once again, we see this Hebrew word: **הולדה (towl'dah)**. The word means genealogies or generations. If this is being recorded and passed down, this likely marks the end of the section that **Shem** passed down.

That means picking up in Vs 10b "when Shem was 100..." is likely being recorded by the next Patriarch. , I believe it is Terah, but we will see that soon enough.

Terah is the eighth generation from Shem, but Shem will actually outlive Terah and Abram. There would have been ample opportunity for Shem to share with all of these descendants.

Shem would have been alive to see Arphachshad, Shelah, Eber, and Peleg. He would have been alive when the languages were divided. He would have seen all of that!

Here we are told that Shem was 100, when he fathered Arpacshad and this happened 2 years after the flood, the flood lasted a little longer than one year. We are guessing that the timing is from the initiation of the flood event, not the ending.

Shem lived after fathering Arpacshad an additional 500 years, for a total lifespan of 600 years. **This is down significantly from Noah's 950 years.**

Shem also had other sons and daughters.

Vs 12-13 - Shem's son Arpacshad, lived 35 years and he fathered Shelah.

After fathering Shelah, he lived an additional 403 years for a total lifespan of **438 years**. This is down significantly from Shem's 600 years. Arpacshad had other sons and daughters.

Vs 14-15 - Shelah then lived 30 years and he fathered Eber.

We have talked a great deal about this name and so I will not say anything additional. After fathering Eber, Shela lived an additional 403 years, for a total lifespan of 433 years, this was inline with his father Arphaxad.

By the way, after fathering Eber, Shela had other sons and daughters.

Vs 16-17 - At 34 Eber fathered Peleg.

Eber, after fathering Peleg lived and additional 430 years, for a total lifespan of 464. This was longer than his father Shelah or his grandfather, Arpacshad.

By the way, Eber had other sons and daughters that we are not told anything about.

Vs 18-19 - Peleg lived for 30 years and then fathered Reu.

After fathering Reu, Peleg lived for an additional 209 years, for a total lifespan of 239 years, this is down significantly from Eber's 464!

Reminder:

"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." (Ge 10:25 ESV)

If we understand all of this correctly, somewhere in Peleg's life the events at the Tower of Babel occurred.

For an estimate, let's put those events in the middle of Peleg's life:

One year after the flood **Arphachad** was born, 35 years later **Shelah** was born, 30 years later **Eber** was born, 34 years later **Peleg** was born then ($209/2 = 105$). So $(1+35+30+34+105=205)$ we have an estimate that the events of the Tower of Babel occurred approximately **205 years after the flood**. Noah was still alive for it!

Vs 20-21 - At 32 years of age, Reu had a son named Serug.

Reu lived an additional 207 years for a total of 239 years, the exact same age as his father Peleg. Reu had other sons and daughters.

Vs 22-23 - Serug lived 30 years and fathered Nahor.

After fathering Nahor Serug lived an additional 200 years for a lifespan of 230 years. So Serug lived nearly as long as father and grandfather. Serug had other sons and daughters.

Vs 24-25 - Nahor was 29 years old when he fathered Terah. Now we are getting close to the action, for Terah is the father of Abram.

Nahor lived another 119 years for a total life span of 148. Quite a drop from dad, granddad, and great granddad. Nahor had other sons and daughters.

Vs 26-27 - Terah lived 70 years and he fathered Abraham, Nahor, and Haran. As we hear the list we suspect the 70 is only attached to one of them (the oldest).

As you look at our genealogy you see indeed Terah is the fathered of Abram, Nahor, Haran, and in Gen 20:10-12 we read: "10 And Abimelech said to Abraham, "What did you see, that you did this thing?" 11 Abraham said, "I did it because I thought, 'There is no fear of God at all in this place, and they will kill me because of my wife.' 12 Besides, she is indeed my sister, the daughter of my father though not the daughter of my mother, and she became my wife." (Ge 20:10-12 ESV)

So later Terah fathers Sarai by another woman, we know she is 10 years younger than Abram.

Next we read that Haran fathered Lot.

Vs 27 – Notice once again that formula that we have become familiar with these are the generations of Terah. The Hebrew word is **תולדה (towl'dah)**. Again some scholars believe this is a subscript and indicates who likely wrote this part of the genealogical record, in this case Terah.

We will see this word again in Genesis 25:19:

"These are the generations of Isaac, Abraham's son: Abraham fathered Isaac," (Ge 25:19 ESV)

Vs 28-29 - Haran, the son of Terah dies in his presence, we are not provided with any details but when a child passes before a parent it is normally some type of tragedy! Haran died while they were living in Ur of the Chaldeans.

Next we read that **Abram and Nahor each took a wife.**

Abram - We know the details. He married his step-sister (both had same dad), although Sarai was 10 years younger than Abram.

Nahor – We read that the name of Nahor’s wife was Milcah. She was the daughter of his brother Haran. She also had a sister named Iscah. Nahor married his niece, his brother’s daughter.

These types of close marriages would later be forbidden by the Mosaic law.

Vs 30-31 - Sarai is barren. Keep all of this in mind, for as the story unfolds, we will find that the child of promise will be born in the land of promise!

We are told plainly that Terah, took Abram, Lot, and Sarai and they left Ur to go to Canaan. Notice it appears that Nahor stayed behind in Ur.

But instead of going straight to Canaan, they went to Haran and settled there!

They should have went westward across the desert to Canaan, instead Terah **moved northwest up the Mesopotamian** valley and settled there!

Keep in mind, Terah by this point was over **100 years old.**

You likely have a number of questions here!

Why did Terah leave Ur, why had he decided to go to Canaan? Why did he instead go to Haran? Did God tell him to go to Canaan?

Here is what we do know:

“2 And Stephen said: "Brothers and fathers, hear me. The God of glory appeared to our father Abraham when he was in Mesopotamia, before he lived in Haran, 3 and said to him, 'Go out from your land and from your kindred and go into the land that I will show you.'” (Ac 7:2-3 ESV)

APPLICATION: It is not enough to purpose to obey God in the areas where God is calling you to a higher level of commitment.

Terah died in Haran... Having never gone to Canaan as he purposed to go.

“By faith Abraham obeyed when he was called to go out to a place that he was to receive as an inheritance. And he went out, not knowing where he was going.” (Heb 11:8 ESV)

Vs 32 - We see the lifespan of **Terah 205 years.** Then the statement that **Terah died, he died in Haran, having never made the promised land.**

We are now ready for the amazing story of Abraham and the formation of the Hebrew nation.

God will take this man (Abram) and make from him a great nation.
